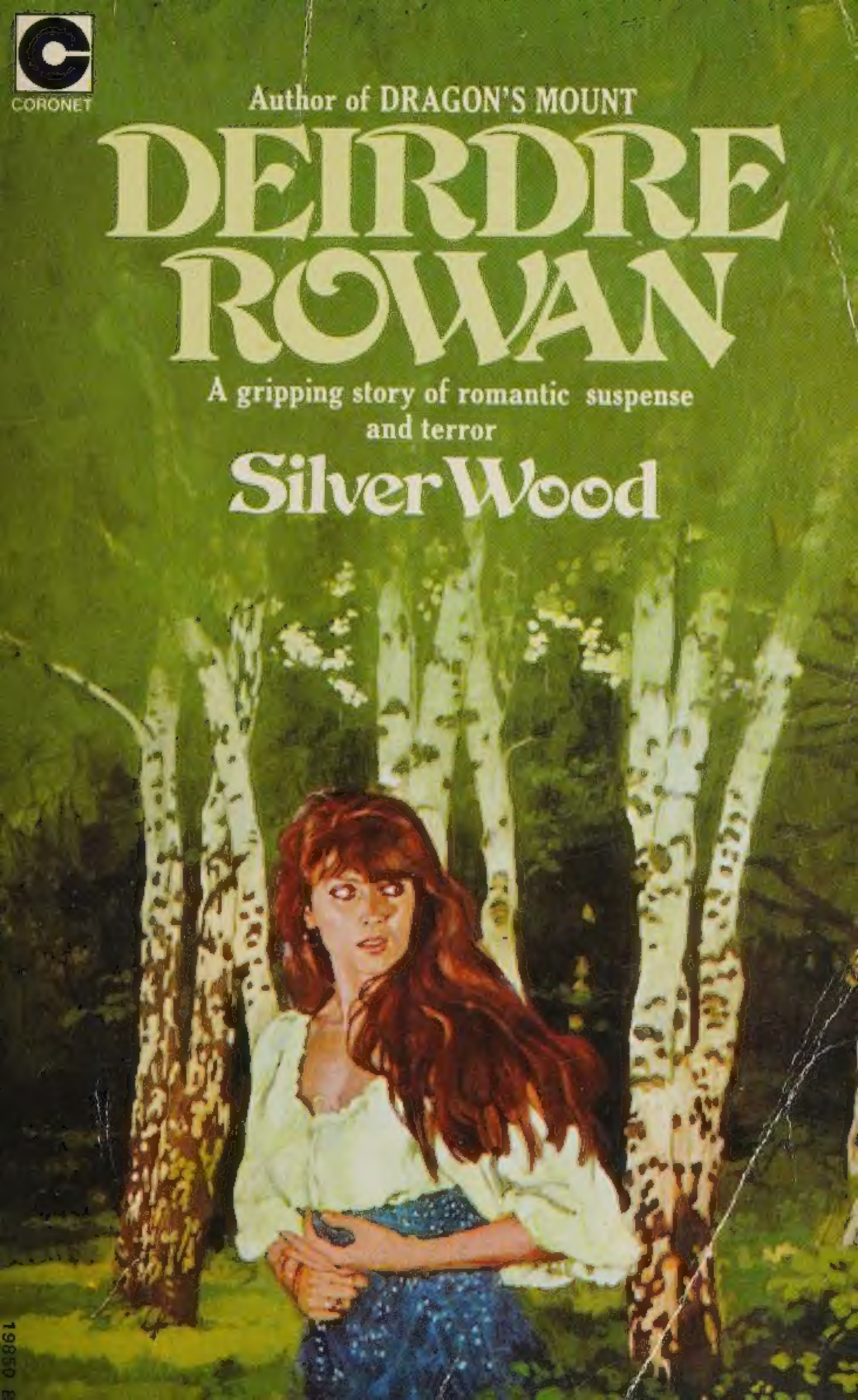
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Silver Wood

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With amazing gentleness, Amlyth took her hand and brought it against his cheek for just a second.

'You will not be harmed,' he promised. 'I swear to you that you will be safe if you play your harp, teach David, and keep clear of traps the rest of us set for each other.' He turned her about and gave her a slight push up the stairs.

Lyn ran up the two remaining flights and found herself standing in a gallery like that outside Dame Isolde's door. She judged that she must be somewhere beyond the solid wall that blocked this part of the house off from the rest. Amlyth opened the huge single door. Lyn saw past him.

A small, red figure lay in a pool of darker red. The head was almost severed, as if the lax, outflung arm had chopped hard and then recoiled, still holding the long broad butcher knife.

Lyn gagged, leaned on the door, and started to scream.

**Also by the same author,
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Dragon's Mount

# Silverwood

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## Deirdre Rowan

CORONET BOOKS
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For June, because she played her harp for me on many afternoons

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# CHAPTER I

Belleforest. The deep, shaded majesty of the giant oaks and chestnuts had a calming effect on Lynette Heath, and she relaxed slightly in the big, boxlike taxi she had hired in London. Beautiful forest!

It truly was a beautiful forest, this country estate of the renowned and formidable Dame Isolde Drude. Wildflowers spangled deep; velvety grass; hollowed dead trunks were planted with trailing geraniums and brilliant wallflowers. Half a mile back the taxi had turned off the dual carriageway onto a gravel road—and into another world. At the first fork of this road, a small village drowsed to the right. The taxi turned left past a flint cottage with a thatched roof. It stood by what had once been a mill pond but was now an idle, playing stream. Cloud-white swans floated below the bridge, convoyed by small, chugging, brown and white ducks.

An old woman scattered feed to sleek black rooks which flapped and strutted on the bit of lawn between the cottage and the water. She wore blue skirts to the ankle and a bold yellow apron. Her silver hair shone in high, dressed coils, and Lyn caught the glint of golden earrings as the woman glanced toward the taxi.

"That's a proper strange one," said the driver, jerking his head in the woman's direction. "Feeding rooks when most stone them away. Foreigner, I'll be bound."

"She certainly looks at home," Lyn said, sounding as American as possible and smiling at the driver. "I wonder if that's her son."

A dark-browed, dark-haired boy of perhaps thirteen or fourteen had waded into sight. His trousers were rolled

above the knee, and he was collecting watercress from the stream. But he paused to frown at the outsiders before deliberately turning his back on them.

"Whoever's his mum needs to teach the scamp some manners," grumbled the driver. He gave Lyn a good-natured, speculative grin over his broad shoulder. "If you be staying in these parts, miss, no doubt you'll find out all about them."

Staying? Lyn hoped so. Harpists were not exactly in demand and though she could teach piano, she much preferred showing young people how her favorite instrument could produce an astonishing range of music. And she longed for at least another year in England. After coming over for a short tour with a chamber music ensemble, she had lingered till her money was almost gone, knowing that she would soon have to use the return half of her ticket. Then she had seen the advertisement in the *Sunday Times,* sent a reply, spoken with Dame Isolde's secretary on the phone, and agreed to visit Belleforest for an interview.

If she proved suitable, the secretary had said, in a tone implying that this was most unlikely, there should be no difficulty in arranging for a work permit that would allow her to stay in England. Harpists, after all, were a rarity, and one able to teach the young person in question would have to be both a paragon and unique.

"I may be going back to London within the hour," Lyn told the driver. "You needn't wait, however, since I'm told someone will take me back." *If necessary.* She crossed her fingers and wished, closing her eyes as she had when a little girl to enhance the spell.

The taxi slowed. Lyn opened her eyes and caught her breath. A huge flint house was set among immense trees that grew close on three sides. The front of the house overlooked a wide, spacious lawn. The drive circled an oval, where a fountain sparkled in sprays of varying height above bronze mermaids and mermen, sporting forever among metal waves darkened by age.

The house, though large, somehow had an informal air. Perhaps it was because of the intimate way it rested among the trees, or perhaps it had to do with the small panels of

glass forming the windows, or the climbing roses around the door, or the fact that Lyn had not often seen flint used for grand houses.

Even so, she felt a bit presumptuous as the driver unloaded her two suitcases. The secretary had told her she had better bring her things. "If Dame Isolde wants you at all, she will require your services immediately, so you may as well be prepared," the brisk-tongued Miss Roxborough had said.

Still, Lyn did not want to march into the house with her luggage, nor did she want to leave it in the middle of the drive. She compromised by asking the driver to put it on the concealed side of one of the pair of stone dragon ships that guarded the entrance.

These ships, set on pedestals sculpted into cresting waves, were ten feet long, but no Dane-King stood in them. There were only the dragons, their necks thrust forward hungrily, man-created monsters seeking their prey.

Children hiding in the prows or bestriding the serpent necks could have turned these grotesque sentinels into benevolent ones but Lyn did not think the monsters had ever experienced such a mellowing use, for there were no nicks or scratches on their baleful visages.

She paid the driver, who tipped his plaid cap and almost winked one merry blue eye. "Good luck to you, miss, whether you go or stay—and may you find out only what's good for you. That's my advice about this world in general, and places like this in particular."

Places like this . . . frozen in time—another time with its own laws. Lyn gave herself a shake as the hearselike taxi circled the fountain of sea creatures and rattled out of sight around a curve shrouded by tall maples.

"You beasties guard my banged-up suitcases," she admonished the dragons. "They're not fit booty for nobility, even of your pirate kind!" She glanced at her watch.

Ten-thirty. Exactly the time appointed by Miss Roxborough. Lyn's mouth had gone very dry; she had applied for probably a dozen jobs in her twenty-five years. She had a reasonable degree of self-confidence, for she knew her limitations and capabilities. She had given private les-

sons, performed with two chamber ensembles, and played the harp for the Philharmonic Orchestra in her small city in Virginia. But it was less than six months ago that she had suffered a crushing blow to her capabilities as a woman.

She had fallen in love with Morgan Philips, the conductor of the orchestra, and through the autumn, he had conducted her through the sweet, tremulous beginnings of courtship. It had been her first really serious attachment since a too-early love in high school. Then she had found that Morgan played this game with every new, young, female performer.

"But my adored Lynette!" he had laughed, pressing her shaking hands to his face and lifting his dark eyes to her in knowing amusement. "Women play so much better when they are loved. They draw music out of their hearts as a gift and bestow it on the audience. Aren't you playing better than you dreamed possible?"

She took her hands away. "Then it was all a trick?" She felt as if her throat were closed, as if the pain constricting her heart and lungs would kill her.

"It was no trick. I love you, you with that questing look! Still so much a child, although so much a woman. . . ."

But she would not melt to him again; she held her hands against his chest when he tried to draw her into his arms. He shrugged and stepped back.

"Lynette." The naked pain in his voice roused her from her own. She looked into his loved, familiar face now gone strange, almost haggard. "It was a game I played—till I met you. Can you understand that a man like me, married to a woman he cannot divorce but with whom he has not lived for years, would console himself with passing loves that assure him he can inspire love?"

"You—are married?"

"Irrevocably."

He spoke with a bitterness that kept her from probing, angry and wounded though she was. He was a vain, selfish, lonely man who would try to fill his emptiness with the warmth of others, but any warmth, any love, chills quickly

in a void. He seemed to her so hollow that if she touched him he would resound like a metallic hull. She was well rid of him; but her emotions, the feelings that accepted no reason, still responded to him and clamored for him.

As if he guessed her conflict, Morgan held out his hands in a gesture of appeal, neither imploring nor commanding. His gaze held hers.

She turned away with her last strength and put all her will into holding her tone steady.

"I'll play the next concert, Morgan, but you'd better start looking for a harpist."

"Oh, really, Lynette. You're not going to be that unprofessional."

"Whatever you want to call it, that's how I'm going to be."

He stared incredulously. "This is a prestigious position for a young person with no more experience than you have. If you give up your chair, you'll lose a lot of pupils. Aren't you, my dearest, cutting off your pretty nose?"

She had to get away from the sound of his voice, from the sight of him, and from the constant closeness that had been so sweet and now was such mockery.

"I won't be changing my mind, Morgan. Goodbye."

Even then he didn't believe her. He opened the door of his office with a small bow, standing slightly in the way so that she had to brush past him. This she did, as if he were part of the wall, but once she was home and in her room, she began to tremble. She locked the door so that her aunt couldn't come in, and cried harder than she had since her parents had been killed in a car collision ten years ago.

When she told Aunt Adrienne she was looking for some kind of touring engagement that would give her a look at other countries, her aunt applauded the idea so enthusiastically that it occurred to Lyn that perhaps her blond, plump, fiftyish only relative might wish for a change, too.

"The truth is, Lyn, that . . . that Dr. Harper asked me to marry him, and of course he would want to live in his old family home."

"Aunt Adrienne! He proposed?" Lyn dashed around the table to hug her aunt. "And you never told me?"

"Well, dear, you were away on a guest appearance that week, and I wanted a bit of time to think it over to myself. I've never married, and we've been very comfortable together, you and I, so compatible with our music. . . ."

"Dr. Harper plays the cello," teased Lyn. "You can have a wonderful time together. I hope you've told him yes."

"Cellists can be temperamental," Aunt Adrienne said nervously, furrowing her still-smooth white brow. She looked pretty, shy, and flustered. "But he said I could have Tabitha and Lionel and vowed that I could practice my usual two hours a day—so I suppose he must be serious."

The thought of brisk courtly Dr. Harper with his mane of white hair and walking stick being anything but serious struck Lyn as wildly funny, but she suppressed her laughter and gave a pat to each of the big cats curled up at opposite ends of the window seat.

"If the doctor will take on these two creatures, you may count on his intentions being honorable. So now that your niece is making a long-overdue move, you make one, too, darling—right across the street to the doctor's. Can you hurry up and get married before I leave?"

So, oddly, Lyn had been her aunt's maid-of-honor a week before she left the States. All her ties were cut, for Aunt Adrienne, newly wed, would have little time to miss her. It was a good time to see the world—or at least a good time to stay away from places that reminded her of Morgan.

Standing now at the great door of Belleforest, Lyn raised the knocker, a pair of miniature bronze mermaids which resembled the statues in the garden. But before the knocker could clatter against the bronze mounting, the door swung open.

Lyn, startled, took a step back. Then she stiffened at the cackle emitted by the gnomelike, tiny man dressed all in black who watched her with eyes as bright and malicious as a crow's.

"Frightened you, didn't I, you pretty, pitiful lass? Where's your harp? Madame says you play one." He shook

his gnarled finger at her. "If you can't play, you'd best leave at once before Madame claps eyes on ye. Madame can't abide folks who claim to do what they are not able."

"Most certainly I can play the harp," said Lyn. "My harp is in Virginia. Dame Isolde told me there was a harp here."

"Oh, there be! There be dozens of 'em."

"Dozens of harps?" The dwarf must be at least slightly mad.

He seemed to read her thought and hooted, producing a crowing sound like that of a rooster. "Yes, lassie, dozens. Of ebony, ivory, myrtle, teak, cypress, oak, whale bone, all kinds of inlay—silver and gold and precious stones. Harps be Madame's fancy, though she has all manner of stringed instruments about. Dulcimers, balalaikas, lutes, zithers . . ."

"And you for a chatterbox. Do step out of the door, Corbie, and let Miss Heath inside." A slim woman, dressed in a soft green dress the muted shade of olive leaves, seemed to float down the curving staircase that coiled along a circular main hall to descend near the main door.

She gave Lyn a cool hand and smile, like an immortal who knows that any human loves or ties are fated, and has learned to avoid deep entanglements while managing surface relationships with skill and smoothness.

"I'm Kate Roxborough," she said in a calm, pleasant tone. "You look fresh after that tiresome ride, I must say, but you'd probably like to wash up before you see Dame Isolde. Corbie can bring your valises."

Indeed the black-garbed, tiny creature already had ferreted out her two suitcases from behind the dragon ship. Their serviceable plastic-treated canvas seemed completely out of place in the polished hall with its three main corridors spinning off from the center, lined with mirrors and pictures. The hall itself was hung with tapestries, mellowed with time, of the hunt, of maidens with unicorns, heads buried in their laps, of battle, and of troubadours playing for lords and ladies.

Brass sconces in the form of spiraled shells circled the

hall, and though they held electric tapers, the effect was still medieval. The parquetry floor, scattered with fur rugs, gleamed in tones from black to umber and from the star-shaped skylight above streamed bright morning light, filtered in the palest tones of green and sapphire and amethyst. There were five or six dark, carved chairs cushioned with tapestry or velvet, two vast chests, and a carved table with a crystal bowl of peonies.

"Put Miss Heath's bags in the Silver Room, Corbie," ordered Kate Roxborough. Corbie turned down the right-hand corridor, his surprisingly strong arms and shoulders humping the suitcases along briskly, though they dragged the floor. Kate and Lyn followed him.

Lyn caught a glimpse of alternating mirrors and portraits, placed so that mirrors on one side reflected the portraits opposite. Then the two women turned into the door at the end of the hall, just short of a huge door paned with long, narrow glass which looked out on the great trees growing close to the house.

"You'll stay the night, however the interview goes," said Kate Roxborough. "The bath is the second door on your right, the other is a closet. I'll wait for you in the round hall."

With a small nod of her ash-blond head, Miss Roxborough glided out after first seeing that Corbie preceded her. Her manner with him was patient, amused, and firm, as with a child. He must be a special pet of Dame Isolde's, who sounded more awesome each time she was mentioned.

But I shall see her within minutes, Lyn told herself. We'll agree or we won't. Then, if I get the job, I can try to understand her and the household and this strange, beautiful place.

The Silver Room could not have been more different from the splendid, almost barbaric hall. Lyn drew a breath of delight and wonder. An arching casement window took up one wall. Through it, one looked out at the glade of silver birches, their leaves rustling and their slim trunks rising white against the darker, heavier trees beyond.

Shimmering, silver-green satin draperies were looped

back with silver swirls, and Lyn resolved that if she came to live here, she would never draw them. Being at the back of the house, with the birches close, gave complete privacy.

Dame Isolde was waiting!

Hurrying at the thought, Lyn quickly tidied herself in the old-fashioned bathroom with its immense clawed white tub, green plush rug, and outsize lavatory. She paused in the bedroom long enough to straighten and repin her high-twisted braids and brighten her lipstick before the silver-framed triple mirror on the dressing table. The mirror reflected a silver velvet chaise longue with a graceful rosewood frame carved into lilies and doves, and a postered bed canopied and coverleted with palest green brocade. The other furnishings were a marble-topped bedside table, an old writing desk with a carved top, and a plain chair beside a bookshelf filled with old, leather-bound volumes and a few modern travel and fashion periodicals. Lyn surmised that these last represented an attempt by Miss Roxborough to provide an American guest with suitable reading.

As Lyn went out, tucking her lipstick into her purse, the lush, deep, moss-green carpet yielded under her feet. She loved the room already. Had it been deliberate on Miss Roxborough's part to entice Lyn with this enchanted heaven before exposing her to her prospective employer?

Corbie had vanished, but Kate Roxborough came smoothly out of her monk's chair with the flowing grace she gave to all her movements. She was like no secretary Lyn had ever seen, but then Dame Isolde was scarcely a typical businesswoman, though her singing had brought her fortunes.

"Ah, quick and efficient, just as we imagine all Americans are." Miss Roxborough smiled. "Dame Isolde will be pleased."

Miss Roxborough led the way up the serpentine stairs. "There is an elevator from the solarium all the way to the cellars," she explained. "But this gives you a better idea of the way the house was conceived. Look down, Miss Heath. Of what does this remind you?"

Lyn gazed down upon the curves of colored light and the winding stair with its graceful convolutions. "It's like being inside a shell, a nautilus perhaps," she answered slowly. "Even the pearly wallpaper adds to the illusion, and so do those corridors branching off to other chambers—"

Kate Roxborough nodded appreciatively, her tawny eyes showing more life than they had till this moment. "I've often thought the place should be called 'The Chambered Nautilus,' but Dame Isolde would think that close to sacrilege. They say Sir Ogier Drude, who built the house from ransoms of his prisoners of Agincourt, put in these stairs that twined and twined so that his wife would stay in her rooms on the second level and seldom come down to the ground floor."

"Why?"

Kate, looking back, came as close as could be imagined to grinning. For a fleeting moment she seemed Lyn's age and fully human. Until now she had seemed like a remote naiad.

"Sir Ogier had a lovely young mistress. Elaine. She was his orphaned ward, and became much more; she slept in the room where you will stay the night. He planted birches for her, progenitors of the present ones, and back in the forest you can still see the little round tower he built as a place where they could meet."

Lyn, short of breath as they neared the top of the second level, tried to keep her voice light. "And did his wife never come down to earth?"

"She came with a vengeance. When Sir Ogier went off again to fight in France, his wife banished Lady Elaine to the small tower, and not long after, a woodcutter found her dead. Everyone believed the wife had poisoned her."

"And when Ogier came home from the wars?"

"His wife ran to the top of these stairs to greet him, but he had heard of Elaine's death, and called out something so terrible that his wife fainted and fell all the way down, to lie at his feet. She was dead by then, of course."

"With a history like that, the house must be haunted!"

"Oh, that wasn't the last or worst of the stories of Belleforest," Kate Roxborough said. "And as if one were really in a sea shell, one still hears the echoes of them. But you don't seem the kind of person to worry about old tales."

"I shouldn't think so," Lyn said with a laugh. "But then, I've no experience with legends."

"You're about to begin." Kate gave her cool, slight smile and tapped before she opened the first door off the gallery.

## CHAPTER II

The room was almost as dark as night. Lyn stood still, letting her eyes accustom themselves to the dimness. The only light was that creeping around pulled draperies of deepest purple velvet. Gradually, Lyn was able to distinguish a figure sitting in a high-backed chair at the far end of the chamber.

Something dark crouched by the chair. At first Lyn thought it was a dog, but then it jumped up suddenly.

"The minstrel lass without a harp!" The dwarf gave his hooting crow. "What if she can't play well, madame? Will you pack her back to London faster than she came?"

"That's none of your affair, you naughty Corbie," said the seated woman, but the rebuke was tinged with affection as she tugged him down beside her. "Well, Kate?"

"Here is Miss Lynette Heath, Dame Isolde." Kate steered Lyn forward with a gentle but surprisingly strong hand under the elbow. "Miss Heath, Dame Isolde would like you to come close."

"And kneel!" cried the little man. "Kneel!"

Lyn stiffened. Were they mad? What kind of place had

she come to? She certainly would not kneel to this imperious old autocrat with her grotesque dwarf chamberlain and unearthly secretary.

"I'm afraid there's been a mistake," Lyn said, but as she turned, her arm was caught. The restraining hand was strong but softened by control. Lyn stopped, thinking that Kate Roxborough had grasped her. Then she saw it was Dame Isolde.

"Child, if you will not kneel to an old woman, perhaps you will bend for my sightlessness. Let me touch your face."

Blind? How dreadful!

"I'm sorry," Lyn blurted, and knelt close to the old woman's knees. Dame Isolde took Lyn's face between her knowing, sensing fingers and searched it with her fingertips as if it were an unknown object, possibly of great worth, perhaps full of danger. The only sound in the room was the rustling of Dame Isolde's taffeta skirts. Lyn's flesh tingled. Ridiculously, she felt as though Dame Isolde were learning all her secrets, even about Morgan and why she wanted so desperately to stay in England. Satisfied at last, the old woman leaned back.

"Get up, child. Corbie, be useful for a change and fetch her a chair. Kate, tea would be nice. You take tea, Miss Heath?"

Lyn nodded at the blind woman and said, "I've come to enjoy it."

"Splendid!" Dame Isolde said approvingly as Kate went out in her soundless fashion. "You're nine-tenths of the way to spiritual kinship with England! Never mind paintings and music and architecture, I've always said! If you don't like the principal food and drink of a country, you don't belong there!"

"Her face, madame," chirped Corbie, hauling up what Lyn had seen described in museums as a farthingale chair, a back stool with intricately embroidered upholstery. "Did you like it? Shall we play our game?"

"You great spoiled child," chided his mistress. "What will Miss Heath think of us?"

"But if you're wrong, I should get my Pontrefact wa-

fers," he pouted, sinking down on a cushion like a disappointed little gargoyle.

"What is the game?" asked Lyn. These were strange people, surely, but she did not sense malice, even from Corbie, with his unnerving sudden outbreaks.

"We began to play it as my sight left." explained Dame Isolde. "When I read a face, Corbie would correct my errors, and he got Pontrefact wafers for my mistakes." She added smugly, "He doesn't get many these days!"

"You learned too quickly," shot back the dwarf. His voice grew mournful. "It was the drill Amlyth gave you, bringing you fruits and leaves and utensils, making you keep at it though you blistered our ears—"

"We don't speak of Amlyth," decreed the old woman. She smiled graciously at Lyn. "Would it amuse you to hear our foolish little game?"

"Please go ahead," urged Lyn. She had no wish to ruin Corbie's pleasure, and she welcomed a chance to study her potential employer before the interview.

"Very well, then." Dame Isolde put her hands to her eyes as if the heightened sensitivity of her fingers spoke to the deadened powers of her eyes. "Miss Heath has a firm chin and a strong jaw line above a long, handsome throat. Her mouth is on the large side, but the lips are happy; they do not curl down, droop, or pull back thinly. Her forehead is broad and her eyes are a good distance apart The nose is straight, a trifle long, possibly. It is a face of excellent proportions."

"But is she pretty, madame? Is she?" Corbie was hugging himself in gleeful suspense.

"So much depends on coloring," replied Dame Isolde. "But this face can only improve with age. Miss Heath may seem too grave now, but in ten years she will be serene, and she will have beauty then if she lacks it now. She will look like the woman on my Viking harp."

"You're cheating!" cried the dwarf, hopping up and down and putting Lyn irrepressibly in mind of Rumpelstiltskin. "Saying what will be in ten years! I won't wait till then for my Pontrefacts!"

"Hush, Corbie! What a din!" Dame Isolde reached un-

erringly into a brass-inlaid teapoy, one of those tea chests mounted on tripod legs and used to keep tea makings out of sight but handy for use. She drew out a small bag of the round, crown-embossed licorice patties. "Here, stop your mouth!"

"I only like those I win," he retorted crossly, disdaining the offer.

"Then let me guess at her eyes and hair," suggested the old woman. Accustomed to rule she might be, but she took extraordinary pains for her peculiar courtier.

Mollified, Corbie grunted and settled back, his bright eyes intent on Lyn.

"Her hair is red like mine," said Dame Isolde. "She has eyes so gray they are sometimes black, and her brows and lashes are sable."

"Her hair is sable!" shouted Corbie. "You're right on the eyes but wrong on the hair! I win! I win!"

Greedily now, he reached for the bag of sweets and fell to munching them as Kate came in with a tray. With practiced ease, she filled one of the fragile Meissen cups with fragrant tea and paled it with a dash of milk, handing it to Dame Isolde.

"Miss Heath? Milk? Sugar?"

"Milk, please, and a cube of sugar."

Corbie declined the beverage through a mouthful of licorice. Kate had hers straight, and as though from long habit gave Dame Isolde a second cup when the first was gone. Dame Isolde loitered over her tea, and Lyn seized on this opportunity to appraise the older woman, since she herself had been so inspected and discussed. She had felt like a piece of furniture sent out on approval, neither accepted nor rejected nor allowed to sink into being part of the whole.

There was enough light to see that Dame Isolde's hair, piled in a curling tangle atop her head, was indeed red; it was such a blatant shade of red that Lyn judged it to be dyed. Someone had skillfully applied eyeshadow, arched oval eyebrows, and tinted the mouth a becoming shade. The skin was surprisingly firm and fresh-looking, age hav-

ing been merciless only around the eyes and throat. She held her spine erect, and there was in her whole manner the indomitable good humor of one who has known the best and worst and laughs at whatever waits.

Lyn had a game of her own, a game in which she tried to capture the essence of a person in one word. *Dame Isolde is* ———. Good? Not necessarily. Lyn was sure she could be ruthless; there had been a cold finality in her tone when she had spoken of an Amlyth who had evidently taken pains to help her live with her blindness.

*Capricious?* Yes, but more, much more than that.

*Dictatorial?* Probably. But that was still not the best word.

*Regal* was close. *Strong* said it.

Pleased with her bit of quick character estimation, but feeling a bit guilty for so closely pursuing a person who could not stare back, Lyn resumed her tea.

"Have you finished your gloat?" Dame Isolde rapped out abruptly.

Lyn nearly dropped the fragile cup. "I . . . I" she faltered. "Dame Isolde, I was *not* gloating!"

"At least you must be glad not to be a blind, aging woman whose career is over."

"You are yourself, Dame Isolde. It would be presumptuous of me to compare us. I was only thinking that you are a very strong person."

Dame Isolde laughed. For the first time a flash of bitterness shot across her face, and edged her tone. "Strong people are usually forced to acquire that quality, my dear. And what else did you conclude?"

"You were beautiful."

Immediately Lyn wondered if her use of the past tense were a clumsy, hurtful blunder, but the mistress of Belleforest smiled and stretched her arms high for a moment.

"Yes, I was! The most beautiful English singer in memory, most said. But more than that, I had a voice—such a voice! I moved people with it, played them with it as perhaps you draw notes from your harp."

"She has no harp," Corbie protested.

"But I have, you rascal, and you know perfectly well the best one is in the corner. Do you see it, Miss Heath? It should be to the right of the grand piano."

Lyn had been facing Dame Isolde since her eyes began to pierce the dim room, and for this reason she had not seen the furnishings. Now she turned and saw that it was a place of music—potential music, for the instruments were mute, of course.

Here were dulcimers, mandolins, viols and lutes, several violins, a cello, and cymbals, but there were no drums or woodwinds. What called to Lyn was the tall harp near the opulent piano. It looked proud, graceful, and lonely.

To Lyn a harp had always seemed like a wave of music made visible. Even in the poor light, she could see that this was a rare instrument, by far the most beautiful she had ever seen. She feared to touch it, in the same moment that she longed to.

"It's a wonderful harp, Dame Isolde. Do you play?"

"Only a bit, Miss Heath. My music was my voice. That did not prevent my loving and collecting instruments, and many were already in the family, for the Drudes have always had music. Now, please, if you are not too tired, I should like to hear what manner of harpist you are."

"If the harp isn't played, it will be out of tune."

"No excuses, child. A chap from the music store in Highbridge comes every month to oil and resin and wax and do whatever is needed to maintain my collection in playing condition. You won't find any frozen, corroded pedals here. If you tour without your own instrument, I'm sure you've coped with many a worse one than this!"

There was nothing for it but to go over and draw the red cushioned bench near the harp. It was absolutely impossible to play the harp with one's legs arranged modestly and gracefully, unless one was wearing a very full skirt. Lyn was wearing a straight skirt; so as she settled with the harp between her knees, she blessed the darkness.

Tentatively she fingered the strings, testing their tone and working the pedals, her mind wholly on readying the harp to play. She was no longer intimidated by the ebony frame with its gold and silver inlays. She no longer paid

any attention the Greek sphinx apex, which had a woman's head and breasts, a muscular lion's body, and dragon's claws, carelessly spread. She now saw the harp as a means of making music, not as a frighteningly beautiful work of art.

When the strings responded truly, she ran through a fast little German folk tune. Then she did a mazurka and glided into her own arrangement of *Greensleeves*. She ended with Wagner's "Magic Fire Music" from *Die Walküre,* a very difficult piece.

The magnificent harp became attuned to her hands long before she finished; she had seldom played better. Here in this dark room, with a blind woman listening, Lyn understood more than ever before how much music could mean.

She sat back, feeling drained, though she could not have played more than fifteen minutes. Dame Isolde gave a deep sigh.

"You play well. So well that I hope you will play for me a little every day. I would like to teach you some old ballads, for they belong to harps and minstrels. Some day I will show you the harp my Danish forefathers brought to this country in the days of Alfred the Great." Corbie tugged at her skirt and whispered.

"But we have not discussed your real duties yet," Dame Isolde said sharply, holding herself even more erect. "Please come closer so we needn't shout."

Lyn went back to the farthingale chair, her fingers still tingling from the harp strings. She was glad that she had shown competence before a demanding judge.

"Give me your hand, Miss Heath. Since I cannot see your face, I must depend on your pulse and body to tell me those reactions that never reach the brain to be concealed in words."

Dame Isolde was like a human lie-detector! It occurred to Lyn that because of her blindness and her need to find other means of perception, Dame Isolde probably knew more about many people than she had when she had relied on sight.

Lyn put her hand into the old woman's. Dame Isolde curved her free fingers about Lyn's wrist, finding the pulse.

Even if Lyn had intended to deceive, it would have been impossible now.

"You are here to teach a child, a boy of fourteen, but in a subtle way. There is music in his family and he has shown some promise. I want you to find what talent he has. If it is the kind to play the fiddle for village fetes, or join the local band, you will teach him for a year or so and improve his skills." Dame Isolde's voice dropped to a harsh murmur. "If he has real talent, a true gift, you must crush it—firmly, gently, irrevocably!"

Lyn recoiled, jerking her hand away as if it had been encircled by a snake. "Dame Isolde! I can't do that!"

"Your job hangs on it," ruled the old woman.

"Then—we've all wasted our time!"

Tears of disappointment and shock blurred Lyn's eyes as she got to her feet. Belleforest was a fascinating place. She had liked Dame Isolde and loved the Silver Room, and had already become intrigued by the legends. This was like being roughly shaken out of a magical dream, so that she'd never know how it would have ended.

But the blind woman's plan was evil, wicked! In the twentieth century, one seldom spoke of selling one's soul, but that was what Dame Isolde had just asked.

Halfway to the door, Lyn turned. "How can you do such a thing?" she cried. "You, an artist? I hope no one will help you, Dame Isolde! What you want is terrible!"

Passing out of the door, Lyn found herself in what now seemed the blazing light of the star-shaped ceiling glass. She leaned against the gallery railing for a moment to steady herself before taking those winding stairs to the bottom.

"Miss Heath!" Dame Isolde's strong, vibrant voice pursued her from the dark chamber. "Lynette, come here!"

Lyn let go of the railing and started down the stairs. She wanted only to get out of the spiraling house as quickly as she could.

Virginia, after all, wasn't the only place in America. She could go to the West Coast, or maybe to Mexico. A house like this, with its haunted past and its seductive beauty,

might entrap her and change her till she could never go home.

No, it was better that she leave before she could fall completely under the spell of Belleforest and Dame Isolde. Witness how shattered she felt at this early stage over not being able to stay.

Corbie caught her shoulder from behind. "Lassie, lassie, come back! Madame has somewhat to tell ye."

"I don't care to hear it," Lyn said. "Will you call a taxi, please, and carry my bags outside? I'll wait there."

"Well, you're a proper cool one for such a sonsie lass!" The dwarf chuckled. "Perhaps it was a mite outrageous, but Madame had to be sure. Come along, now. She was but testing you."

"Testing!"

Bewildered and angry, Lyn stared at the little man. Kate Roxborough appeared on the gallery and called down to placate her. "I sympathize with your annoyance, Miss Heath, but please talk again with Dame Isolde. She's sorry to have offended you."

In the face of these conciliatory measures, Lyn would have felt churlish if she had left without seeing the old woman who was doomed to perpetual blackness, more tragic amid such beauty. Lyn permitted Corbie to haul her triumphantly before his mistress, who took both of Lyn's hands this time and smiled.

"You must stay with me. You must teach the boy!"

"Dame Isolde, I will not do what –what you asked."

Laughter trilled from the old, still-graceful throat. "Of course you won't! That's why I want you!"

"I don't understand—"

Dame Isolde gave Lyn's hands a caress and let them go. "How could you? Forgive my trick, but I had to be sure that you had strength and purpose as well as talent. If you had agreed to what I asked, I would have sent you away. Now I know you are right to teach the boy." She said in a wooing tone, "You will stay?"

Still on guard and slightly resentful, Lyn sat down. "I'd better know exactly what I'm to do, and of course, what-

ever you and I may agree, a boy of fourteen may not wish to learn from a specific teacher."

Dame Isolde waved her hand. "If I select you, who is he to argue?"

"That's a shrewd question, madame!" chortled Corbie. "Who is he, indeed?"

"Mind your tongue!" scolded his mistress. "The boy is a very early indiscretion of my son's who has been reared by his grandmother after the mother drowned in the mill pond." Lyn almost gasped, remembering the handsome boy gathering cress and the striking old woman by the mill cottage.

"I have heard young David has a strong musical bent," went on this most irregular of grandmothers. "I'm especially interested since my son apparently means to stay a bachelor, or never inform me if he does marry. I would do anything to keep the music of the Drudes alive, even if it means nurturing that power in tainted sources."

"Have you talked about this with David?"

"I do not discuss matters with children," sniffed Dame Isolde. "But I have spoken with his grandmother. Megan Alworth is a remarkable woman. I suspect that not too far back we have a common male forebear. She scrapes a living through her garden and taking in sewing. She is glad for the boy to have his chance as long as he remains with her—and when she sends him for his lessons you may be sure he will come!"

What a strange conversation that must have been—a conversation between two strong-minded old women about their mutual grandson, born of the betrayed daughter of one and begat by the son of the other!

"I would like to try with David," Lyn said. "Has he had any musical training?"

"Just a bit from the vicar's wife, but he gets such music from his grandfather's old fiddle that you wouldn't believe!"

"Then it seems a violin teacher would have been better."

"Ah, one plays what one has," said the old woman

smugly. "But when he was brought in here by Corbie on some pretext, he went straight to the harp. Looked at it with his heart in his eyes, old Megan told me."

Dame Isolde leaned back and let her eyelids droop. Just when Lyn thought she was asleep, she spoke with fierce intensity.

"Heed one thing! I don't want fragile talent encouraged beyond its range of personal pleasure. But if the boy has a true gift, it can best be developed by a tough-minded, lovely woman, a woman he will love with his awakening manhood, a woman he can never have. It is vital, this imprinting by a teacher. You have heard of imprinting, Miss Heath?"

Vaguely, from her smattering of biology and animal behavior, Lyn summoned up pictures—a kitten following a hen, a dog with a young monkey, two geese arching long necks to greet a man they regarded as their parent.

"Isn't the general idea that an infant of whatever species will accept the first creature who nurtures it as his mother?"

"That's it. And so the teacher who imprints the freshborn artist is more important by far than the biological parent." Dame Isolde gave a grim nod. "I had nothing to say about David's mother, but I have everything to say about his teacher!"

"I'll do my best," Lyn said.

"That's what I'll pay you for." Once more, Dame Isolde closed her eyes. This time she wasn't feigning sleep, for her jaw dropped and she began to snore.

Corbie stretched out on the rug, his head on his cushion. He winked at Lyn and relaxed as if prepared to sleep away the afternoon, voluntarily sharing his mistress's darkness.

"Let's go down," said Kate Roxborough softly. "You can unpack, and we will lunch together if that's agreeable. Dame Isolde won't be disturbed till tea, but we all dine together when she's well."

"She has another disability?"

"Usually she's extremely well, but on occasions she has

hideous migraines that last for two or three days. Then she stays in the solar and won't have anyone near her but Corbie."

"Her son—does he live here?"

"Nobody knows where Amlyth is, except that it's not here," said Kate. They had reached the lower hall, and she walked with Lyn to the corridor. "You'll meet Mrs. Killigrew, our housekeeper, soon enough, but if you need anything, ring for a maid. There are two about, if they're not holding hands with their boy friends in some corner. Sally lives in and Mary comes daily from the village."

"Thank you, Miss Roxborough."

"Make it Kate," said the young woman, with a warming smile. "We'll be seeing too much of each other for the formality. Lunch is at one. I'll meet you in this hall and take you to the dining room. After lunch, I'll show you some of the house and grounds."

With a wave, she disappeared down one of the other corridors. Lyn walked between alternating portraits and mirrored reflections toward the Silver Room, with the silver wood beyond.

## CHAPTER III

She hung her clothes in the vast closet. She felt a vague sense of unreality, which deepened each time she glanced around the room or looked out at the birches. The furnishings had changed completely since the time of Sir Ogier, but his young mistress must have looked out at the same sky and trees.

Even the matter-of-fact chore of finding homes for her toothbrush and cosmetics did not shake Lyn's illusion of being in a dream. She arranged her manicure set, brush,

and comb on the dresser and told the girl in the triple mirror that she hoped someone else slept along this corridor.

Then she scoffed at her fears. Any house that had endured for over five hundred years must have had scores of tragedies, great and small. But there would have been weddings and feasts and birthdays and countless ordinary, unmarked days. She was what Aunt Adrienne would have called "spooked" by that interview with Dame Isolde.

Once things fell into a daily routine—once Corbie became a small man instead of an uncanny goblin, Kate ceased being a creature from another dimension, and Dame Isolde seemed more a great singer gone blind and old than a fated seeress—then life here would become the normal thing.

Especially since she'd be teaching the boy she had already seen wading in the stream. There was nothing spectral about his sun-browned face or scowl.

Did his looks come from Amlyth, the mysterious son who had fathered the boy, deserted the mother, and was now so elusive in his whereabouts? In view of such callousness, it was strange that he had been concerned enough for Dame Isolde to help her meet her blindness in a way that left her in considerable control.

Lyn changed into a yellow cotton dress and went along the corridor to the hall. She heard Kate's voice, filled with an uncharacteristic urgency, counterpointed against a man's deep, soft laughter.

Hesitating, Lyn decided that Kate might welcome rescue. In any case, it was lunchtime. As Lyn stepped into the hall, Kate's words died on her lips, but there was no mistaking the relief in her eyes.

"One on the dot and here you are!" she cried with animation so unlike her that it had to be caused by the man. "Miss Heath, this is Amlyth Drude—Dame Isolde's son. Amlyth, Miss Heath has been engaged by your mother to—to play the harp."

So Kate Roxborough could be shaken out of her tranquility by someone! Lyn did not have much chance to be amused by this, for the tall man with dark, auburn hair captured her hand and bowed over it while he scanned her

with searching hazel eyes that were anything but respectful.

"So you're to soothe my mother's savage breast. I wish you luck, Miss Heath." His long mouth curved down, and he regarded her in a mocking, appraising way that brought blood to her cheeks. "Just remember that in return for David's sweet tunes, which lulled King Saul's devils, the King tossed a javelin at his minstrel one day."

"I find your mother a remarkable and admirable woman."

He raised an eyebrow. "Really? I suppose it all depends on what one admires."

"I should think —" Lyn began hotly, and then checked herself. She must not let him draw her into reckless statements. Besides, he was plainly enjoying this. But the ominous thing was her response to him; he roused something in her that had been bruised and broken by Morgan, sensations she had believed dead. She didn't want to care for another man, at least not for years. Her heart needed time to heal; she wanted to learn more about life and acquire enough experience to keep her from being made a fool again.

Certainly she must not let herself be interested in this mysterious, disagreeable man who had let a young girl, pregnant by him, pay a dreadful price for their love. Lyn's mind knew all this, but her quickened blood did not.

"You should think what?" Amlyth Drude demanded, laughing. "Or rather, let's hear what you *do* think, not what you should."

"We were just going to lunch," Kate interposed, to Lyn's great relief. "Will you join us? Your mother is resting, but of course if you want to see her directly, you could go on up."

"Dear Kate," he teased merrily, kissing her lightly on the forehead. "What a tactful way to ask if I'm staying long. The fact is, I don't know, but certainly I shall stay long enough for a number of conversations with our sovereign. I'll happily take lunch with you charming ladies."

Kate gave him a look of apprehension and led the way down the center corridor, turning into a corner room with

windows along two sides. The forest had been trimmed back about a hundred yards to give light and view, and flower beds threaded with paths made a garden with a fountain in its center. Stone benches were scattered here and there, and a sundial stood at the highest point of a rockery bright with dwarf tulips and pinks.

"This is the family dining room," Kate explained. She pulled a sliding door half-open to show Lyn the adjoining big room, which was dominated by a mahogany table, sideboards, and buffets. "That's the large dining room, which hasn't been used since—" Her glance met Amlyth's and she added in confusion, "It hasn't been used in a long time. We'd rattle around in it."

"I thought it was ghosts that rattled chains," remarked Amlyth, "or do you suppose armor can rattle, the kind of armor Hamlet's ghost father wore? I should imagine it would chink. Do you hear chinking of nights, sweet Kate?"

Kate's tone was brittle. "You still talk nonsense, don't you, Amlyth? I hope that at least you'll not trouble your mother."

"Let sleeping corpses lie, eh? That always was your style, Kate, but even peaceful corpses decay, and nostrils unused to it may wonder at the stench."

"Change your subject matter or dine on your own," Kate flashed.

"Oh, don't banish me!" He pulled his forelock in exaggerated anguish. "Meals alone! I remember their horror, all too well, from my youth." He seated the women at the two laid places, picked up the silver bell, and gave it a vigorous ring.

In came a sturdy yellow-haired girl dressed in a blue nylon work smock, wheeling before her a trolley laden with salad, cold meats, cheeses, and an assortment of wheat and rye crackers. She stared at Amlyth, who gave her a much pleasanter smile than he had so far bent on either Kate or Lyn.

"Sally," instructed Kate, "please set a place for Mr. Drude."

"And tell the dragon—pardon me, Sally, I mean Mrs.

Killigrew—to ready my old room. If there isn't plenty of Scotch, she should order some in. And she should put all necessaries for tea near my bed, I hate having it brought at inconvenient moments."

"Yes, sir," whispered Sally, round-eyed. A flirtatious dimple appeared in her chin. "It ...t's a pleasure, sir, having the young master home!"

"Thank you, Sally." His eyes had a sardonic glint. "Give me a plate and silverware and then go share the joyous news with Mrs. Killigrew."

The girl complied, unloaded the trolley, and rushed out, full of her tidings.

Amlyth gave Kate a brazen grin. "You don't seem to think it'll be such a pleasure, having the young master."

"That depends entirely upon you."

He shrugged. "Well, if you didn't baste the fatted calf, there's at least plenty of cold ham, beef, and chicken. Shall we celebrate with wine?"

"Please yourself," said Kate shortly.

Amlyth got three glasses from a window cabinet and surveyed the wines standing on the nearest sideboard.

"Pale, dry, and expensive for you, my Kate," he decided, uncorking a bottle of Pommard Billardet. "I want something with more vigor. Beaujolais. Here's some Morgan. And you, Miss Heath?"

"Either is fine."

He gave her a flash of white teeth and deliberately poured her a glass of water from the crystal pitcher on the tray. "Those with no preference in wines should stick to water."

Lyn did prefer water, as a matter of fact, but it grated to have this self-confident autocrat give her such a snub.

"I shall have some wine," she said, and marched over to the sideboard. She scarcely knew one bottle from another but she hastily chose some Reisling Spätelese which was already unsealed, carried it to the table, and filled her glass.

Amlyth stared at her. "So you pretend to have no palate for wine, yet you pick the rarest one there—Dame Isolde's own stock from the late, fullest-flavored, almost raisinlike grapes from the Rhine. Curious. Very curious."

Lyn stopped the glistening wine on the way to her lips. "If it is Dame Isolde's—"

"Everything here is Dame Isolde's," Amlyth said. "But she graciously sends down her bottles when the bouquet starts to go."

"One can always drink a different vintage," Kate said in an acid tone.

Amlyth looked straight across at her till her eyes dropped. Then he spoke with soft mockery. "Sweet Kate, always a model of rectitude and propriety. Discretion, too, above all, for any secretary to my mother would have to be confidential, wouldn't she?"

"So long as I satisfy Dame Isolde, I can't see that my qualifications are any concern of yours."

Amlyth applauded, grinning toward Lyn. "Remember that speech, Miss Heath, to squelch me if I ever presume to inquire into your no doubt very commendable skills and experience." He switched his words to Kate so swiftly that it was almost a pounce. "How goes it with my father, Kate?"

Her fork fumbled slightly against the china. "Why—he's as usual." She gave an expressive shrug of her slim shoulders, and a faint look of disgust tightened her mouth.

"Still on the bottle?" inquired Amlyth. "His brain must be pickled by now, not to mention his larynx. Poor old boy! It wasn't his fault he wasn't as great a singer as his wife."

"Amlyth, you really should not—" began Kate.

"Nonsense. Miss Heath needs to know some basics, or she'll be frightened out of her wits." He said to her cosily, "When you see a figure walking the roof at the east side of the house, don't think it's a ghost. It's only my father, who gets his exercise there and then descends, not to the sulphurous regions, but to his bottles and the infernal deserts of inner space."

"I must warn you not to say such things to your mother," Kate remonstrated. "She worries quite enough about your father as it is."

"Oh? Is that why she's banished him to the other side of the house?" Amlyth checked Kate's reply with a gesture of

his hand. "Never fear, Kate. I understand my mother better than you can. After all, as she is fond of reminding me, did she not break off concerts for two whole years in order to conceive and nurse me? I am blood of her blood, bone of her bone." He closed his eyes. For a moment he almost seemed to shudder before he smiled slantingly at Lyn. "It is a fearful thing, Miss Heath, to be the child of a woman who expects you to justify her sacrifice in giving you birth."

He rose abruptly. "Please excuse me. I will go see my father now and later join my mother for tea." He passed from the room with a light, long stride.

"As much a boor as ever," breathed Kate, her green eyes no longer tranquil but lit with golden fires. "I hope he won't stay long."

"How long has he been away?"

Kate did not have to take time to think. "Six years. He's an anthropologist, always living with some tribe somewhere, which breaks Dame Isolde's heart."

"Why?"

Kate stared moodily at the door through which he had vanished. "Amlyth had a good voice but refused lessons. He is a brilliant violinist, but would never perform. In short, he could have continued the Drude tradition of music but would not."

So young David was being seized on in desperation as a blood if not legal Drude? Such fanaticism about a musical heritage was understandable to Lyn, and at least it was purer than obsession with money, genealogy, or social status. But it also conjured up such possibilities of ruthlessness that Lyn inwardly flinched and scarcely knew whether to hope that young David had talent or not.

Even though the arrogant Amlyth Drude was not a person she wished to champion, Lyn found herself saying, "Perhaps Mr. Drude was afraid he'd disappoint his mother –that he wouldn't measure up."

"Amlyth?" Kate flashed her a look of disdain. "You should know him better than that by the way he holds his head, damn him. No. He could have made a greater name even than Dame Isolde's, critics she brought in secretly to

appraise him have said so. He just would not. *Would* not. Because it was his mother's wish."

"It may not have been the fact that it was her wish as much as the way she went about trying to achieve it," Lyn suggested. "It can't be usual to have one's son surreptitiously evaluated. No one likes to be controlled and moved like a marionette."

"No danger of that with Amlyth," Kate said with a short laugh. "He's his mother's son, that's certain." She rang the bell. "Would you like dessert or only coffee?"

"Coffee, please."

"As soon as we've finished, I'll show you around the house." Now that Kate had dismissed Amlyth from her mind, her face had settled back into its calm, almost too-perfect aspect. "If there's time, we can take a short stroll on the grounds."

"I'd like that, if it won't keep you from your work."

"I work when Dame Isolde wants me," Kate said simply. "Otherwise I'm free." And she gave Lyn an intent stare, as if trying to guess whether Lyn would fit into this strange and beautiful but intimidating place.

Under the swirl of stairs, Kate pressed a small button. There was a faint hum. In a moment, a panel of the wall slipped back, revealing a paneled elevator fitted with a velvet bench.

"I don't suppose the basement would interest you," said Kate. "That's where the central heating is, food and wine storage, and the laundry. So we'll just go straight up to the solar."

Lyn had never liked the boxlike atmosphere of elevators. This one, so glidingly efficient in this ancient house, seemed an especial affront. However, it was no doubt extremely useful and it had been carefully concealed

"If Sir Ogier's wife had used an elevator, she wouldn't have broken her neck," Lyn joked, trying to ease her own feelings of unreality and strangeness.

"Elevators have been known to jam," Kate said, stepping out. Lyn followed her into a blaze of light.

The solar was one great, round room, its roof a panel

of glass supported by cedar beams. The rug was Tyrian purple; it was so rich and lush that the several couches and chairs seemed unnecessary. There was nothing else in the room except playing benches and harps—more harps than Lyn had seen in her life. But on the walls, from floor to ceiling, ran frescoes of people with harps—film-clad Egyptian girls playing tall, bowlike instruments, Celts with their sacred harps, Norse singers, and Teutonic bards, all playing, holding, or carrying their instruments as if they were divine gifts more precious than life. There were no modern portrayals, but the real harps—Lyn turned to them in wonder.

Here were modern double-action harps, chromatic harps, strange variations like the harp-lute that seemed a mixture of guitar, lute and harp, a priceless grand vertical harp from the days of Rameses III, and beautiful Celtic harps, Irish and Welsh, that must have belonged to kings or priests. There were seventeenth-century harps with the screws in the neck that had allowed the first adjusting of strings to fix semi-tones, and some of the early inventions of Hochbrucher, the Bavarian who invented the use of pedals for changing strings so that the hands could be free to play.

Lyn moved closer to one of the earliest double-action harps evolved by Sebastian Erard in 1810. Then she turned from it to what must have been the Viking harp Dame Isolde had mentioned, for the pedestal was a woman with a dragon coiled at her feet, and the profile was uncannily like the one Lyn saw when she used the triple mirror.

This was a finer, rarer collection than Lyn had ever found in museums, though she had seen examples of similar harps shut behind glass or standing on plinths. The harps she had seen in museums had seemed dead—beautiful but lifeless.

Here, in Dame Isolde's sun-drenched, windowless room, lit only by the sky above, the harps seemed as though they were dreaming. They were like ancient, ageless embodiments of music made concrete, of potential melody waiting to be released. In their diverse national-

ities, shapes, and histories, they seemed like living creatures, each with a personality of its own. Perhaps these harps had been loved and prized so long that they had practically acquired individual wills.

"Marvelous," Lyn breathed. "I would never have dreamed there was a room like this anywhere in the world."

"Ah," said Kate drily, "and did you dream Dame Isolde would be as she is?" She turned back to the waiting elevator. "We must hurry, we've only an hour. I won't show you the second level. My rooms, Corbie's, and Dame Isolde's are all on this side of the house. On the other side, walled off at this level, are her husband's. He has his own establishment. We rarely see him."

By now Lyn had overworked the word "strange." She was beginning to feel that everything at Belleforest was strange at the very least, and that she must accept eccentricity as the rule. So she said nothing while the elevator hummed its smooth way to the central hall.

Kate nodded toward the corridor leading to the dining room. "The kitchens and pantries are on this side, near the dining and banquet rooms. That middle corridor leads to the servants' rooms. And your corridor—the guest rooms are along it, as well as the library and a small sitting room. You may explore there on your own when you've time. Why don't we go out through your entrance and have a quick stroll?"

They did this, stepping out among the birches and passing through them to a walled garden behind an old stable block crowned with a clock. On the warm old brick garden wall, ivy twisted thick and glossy green, while a riot of flowers grew in a wide border down its length.

"Belleforest has very little in the way of flowers and landscaped parkland," Kate said with a touch of complaint. "The owners have always preferred to be hugged tight by trees. But we do have a very productive vegetable garden and lovely, soft fruits."

She opened the heavy iron gate to the garden to let Lyn through. The enclosed half-acre had peach and pear trees espaliered along the east and north walls. Mesh protected

thriving berry bushes. Other vines climbed along the western wall, laden with black and green berries. There was a long row of frames mulched with straw. Kate smiled at a man who rose from his squatting posture to jerk his cap.

"How long till strawberries, Thomas?"

"A few days of real sun will bring them on, Miss Kate." He had a broad, ruddy face, muttonchop whiskers, and clear blue eyes that regarded Lyn with interest.

"Miss Heath, this is Thomas Tidwell, who manages the estate as well as being head gardener. Belleforest couldn't do without him—could it, Thomas?"

If there was just a touch of malice in Kate's question, the wind-browned gardener ignored it and chuckled. "I don't think it could, at that, Miss Kate. But it's good to have new faces about, especially pretty ones." He tugged his cap again.

"Thank you," Lyn said, almost blushing at the unexpected compliment. "What a handsome garden. I've never seen such a big one."

"Well, miss, we do grow fine broad beans here, and good cabbage and broccoli, but carrots don't like our soil much. Our tomatoes and brussels sprouts are the best in the county—"

"Pardon me, Thomas, you can explain local agriculture to Miss Heath later, but we're in a bit of a dash just now." Kate nodded goodbye. So did Lyn, who followed her guide through another gate. This side of the wall was lined with roofed sheds and open structures running the length of the wall and beyond.

"Most aren't used now except for storage," said Kate, "but once there was a smithy, a cobbler, a leather-repairing shed, a carpenter's workroom, potting sheds—any time a new building was needed, they stuck one on." She pointed to a row of modern greenhouses. "These are in use, and the orchards stretch back to where the forest starts again. Once, of course, Belleforest had its own cattle, pigs, and chickens, but it's simpler now to buy from farmers. Except for this little area and the garden you saw from the dining room, all the hundreds of acres of the estate are forests."

"Are there paths through the forest?"

"Oh, yes, paths and even some bridle paths, though we keep no horses now. Amlyth rode, but when it seemed he was never coming back, Dame Isolde auctioned off the animals."

They had circled the long stable block with its air of decay and came back past the garden, through the birches, and into the hall. There they were halted by suitcases and trunks blocking the hall. The door opposite Lyn's was open, and a deep voice sounded in exasperation.

"Sally! Mrs. Killigrew! There's no need to put fresh paper in perfectly clean drawers before I toss my things into them."

"Now, sir, if you will ignore what I say about the unsuitability of this room, at least you can leave the unpacking and arranging to us," snapped Mrs. Killigrew. "I've unpacked many a trunk in my time, for ladies and gentlemen both, and I know how to do it proper."

"Very well, just stay out of the green trunk, which has records and papers that must not be fuddled and muddled. I'll leave my shirts and socks to your mercies." The voice neared the door. "You must understand one thing, Mrs. Killigrew. This has always been my room, and I don't intend to change my habits for a young lady who probably won't last the week. Let her move, if anyone does."

"I'm sure she will, sir. No decent woman can sleep across the hall from a bachelor."

"The devil with decent women!" Amlyth blasted and stepped out to almost collide with Lyn.

He stared at her a moment, black-browed and frowning. Then he lifted his strong throat and shouted his laughter. "Well, here she is, to speak for herself. Are you a decent woman, Miss Heath? Will you leave the Silver Room?"

# CHAPTER IV

Stung by his derisive tone as much as by his impudent question, Lyn shot back without thinking, "No." Then, after thinking it over and noting Mrs. Killigrew's disapproving, rouged visage, she added positively, "I will not leave my room."

"That's most unwise of you, miss," bristled the housekeeper, while Sally stared with wide eyes.

"Lyn, dear, perhaps—you know, it *is* a bit awkward." Kate tugged gently at Lyn's arm. "Amlyth wouldn't molest you, of course. Crude as he is, he has some standards. But you know how people gossip here in the country -"

Amlyth watched Lyn, a crooked smile on his long mouth, one eyebrow lifted. He was daring her, damn him! She must either give up the charming room she already enjoyed so much or be branded as a hussy by Mrs. Killigrew and no doubt the surrounding region.

"It's not by my choosing that you came home unexpectedly and have your quarters across from mine," Lyn said. "I am very pleased with the Silver Room. Men and women occupy adjoining rooms in hotels. That is how I shall view our proximity, Mr. Drude."

He gave a clap of his hands. "Well done! A breaker of tabus! But Queen Victoria couldn't have said it more primly." Smoothing his unruly thick hair back, he glanced at his watch. "Are you going up to mother, Kate?"

"If you're ready."

He made a face. "Who was ever ready for her? Let's say -" He gave Kate an enigmatic smile which made her frown and look away as they walked down the corridor. "Let's put it that I have summoned up the courage to en-

brace my fate, ask riddles of the sphinx, demand answers along with Oedipus. Let's say, sweet Kate, that I have made a swearing to the gods. In other words, I have come to see my mother."

"You are a one," Kate said. She pushed the elevator button. In a moment they were on the second floor.

"The levels of hell," murmured Amlyth. "Which one do you suppose this is? She dwells in darkness, she who had such regal eyes, who watched humankind with the high, indifferent gaze of a hawk. Oh, she inhabits hell, but is it the proper one?"

"What gibberish," scolded Kate, her hand on the door. An imploring note entered her voice. "Please, Amlyth, don't upset her—don't drag up things best forgotten."

He made no answer. Kate's face lost its momentary persuading softness. She looked at him with near hatred as she tapped and opened the heavy door.

The darkness was a smothering, enveloping assault. Lyn stood at the threshold, sensing Amlyth close by. She felt oddly steadied by his presence, though he was far from her definition of a reliable person. He laughed from deep in his throat, and mockery seemed to echo in the vast, darkened chamber.

"Oh mother, mother. Still determined that since you live in night, so shall everyone."

There was the sound of a painful, caught-in breath. Then there was silence, followed by a scuffling sound and Corbie's urgent plea, "Madame—madame—"

"Why did you startle her like that?" Kate hissed.

"I am not startled that he came." Dame Isolde's voice thrust strong and dry. "Only that he stayed away so long. How do you explain yourself, Amlyth?"

The three at the door moved forward, able now to see the figure in the large chair with Corbie at her feet. She stared up toward Amlyth—how terrible to peer eagerly for what one could never see again—and slightly tilted her cheek. He bowed, but kissed her hand, not her face.

"That's formal, after six years," Dame Isolde said.

"You will forgive me, mother, if direct kisses remind me of Judas."

She gave a small, shaky laugh. "Ah, Amlyth, you always had a taste for drama. At least sit close and let me touch your face, since I can't look at you."

He was so tall that even when he sat at her knees, it was easy for her to trace his face with her long, graceful hands. It seemed to Lyn that the fingers lingered and caressed. Whatever was between Amlyth and his mother, Lyn was sure that Dame Isolde loved this son.

"More lines, mother," said Amlyth, moving restively as if he found this scrutiny more difficult than a probing gaze. "I think you are thinner."

"It may be." He firmly took her hands and placed them in her lap, where they lay as if dead. "What, Corbie, no demands for Pontrefact wafers?"

"I'll take them if you offer," growled the dwarf. "But mind well, I never asked. And don't think I'll be grateful to ye."

"Be grateful to the Pontrefacts, then," said Amlyth, who tossed a bag of the licorice to the little man and took a chair by Lyn's.

"How long have you been here?" Dame Isolde asked.

"Since lunchtime."

"Kate! Why wasn't he brought up at once?"

"I thought you needed your rest," said Kate. "After six years, a few hours didn't seem important."

"In future, you will kindly let me make such decisions!"

"Yes, Dame Isolde."

Amlyth had been glancing around. "Should I congratulate you on keeping the room as funereal as ever?" he asked.

"Mind your manners, Amlyth! I will not sit alone in darkness while others stare at me!"

"Mother," protested Amlyth with an almost indulgent laugh, "had you been Lucifer, you would have refused to fall!"

She regarded him with interest. "Have you taken to writing plays?"

"No. I only write about the life and customs of the peoples I live with."

Her mouth quirked. "And have you learned interesting things?"

"Yes," he said, accepting the challenge. "I have learned that holy and unholy are dangerous for the same reasons, because of the power in them, the tabu power that can defile or destroy an ordinary mortal while it consecrates a king. I have known people who accidentally broke a tabu and died of fear when they learned they had transgressed. Only civilized people try to believe they can break tabus and live—but they pay, even so."

"Ah," murmured Dame Isolde, "I knew we'd get quickly to the superiority of the savage!"

"They can put interesting interpretations on things," Amlyth pondered, resting his chin in his hands. "Once I spent a rainy season at a homestead in the African bush. We spent a lot of time drinking beer and telling stories, and one anthropologist told a funny one about explaining a Shakespeare play to an African tribe."

"Which did he choose?" asked his mother, eager despite her pride. Her manner showed that she had longed for entertainment, especially from her son.

"He tried to give them Hamlet." He laughed. "That was a mistake to begin, since this tribe didn't believe in ghosts and kept insisting Hamlet's father's ghost was simply an illusion created by a witch." He shook his head in remembered laughter. "And then they all thought it proper for Claudius and Gertrude to marry at once, otherwise who would hoe Gertrude's fields? And they said that a nephew would never, never kill his uncle; he would take proof of wrongdoing to his uncle's agemates, who would deal with him."

"Sounds frustrating," Kate remarked.

"You've no idea. But then the chief decided that it was a pretty good story anyway, the anthropologist just hadn't understood it properly. Obviously, Hamlet had been bewitched or he wouldn't dream of trying to kill his uncle, and if the uncle had bewitched the young man, then Claudius brought about his own destruction. The anthropologist just gave up when they asked who had married the

dead king's other wives. They said that any chief who taxed his subjects in order to pay for the hoeing and beer-making and such work would be hated. A good chief would have had plenty of wives."

Dame Isolde chuckled. "No anthropologist will try Shakespeare again, without forewarning."

Amlyth agreed. "When all else fails, I've got the answer, 'That is the way it is done, so that is how we do it.' "

"One can't say fairer than that," applauded Kate.

"And have you learned wisdom? asked Dame Isolde, peering at her son as if determination would allow her to see him.

"Wisdom, mother?"

"You were always bold, rash, even as a baby. You ran before you walked—ran and fell and got up again, ran and fell, till at last you could run without falling. You would never listen to me or your nanny or your father—" Her voice snagged on the last word and trailed away.

"My father?" Amlyth turned to Kate and Lyn. "Would you mind? I'd like to talk to my mother privately."

Kate frowned, but Dame Isolde said in a calm, fatalistic tone, "Yes, everyone must go. Except for Corbie."

"You may keep him," Amlyth vouchsafed.

So Kate and Lyn left the dark room. Grudgingly closing the door behind them, Kate said furiously, "It's not fair, damn him! I've taken care of Dame Isolde all these years. I have a right to know what he's going to say to her."

Lyn said something soothing about family matters. That only served to further stir Kate's angry resentment. "What kind of son leaves his mother alone for six years?" she demanded. "He'll get her upset, create a lot of problems, and then I'll be left to cope with things."

There wasn't much that Lyn could say to that. "I suppose they'll at least have the courtesy to ask us up for tea," grumbled Kate as they descended the winding staircase that gave such an odd, spiraled view of the hall below. "I'd better make sure there's enough of everything."

She went toward the kitchen, while Lyn slipped into her

room. In the midst of studying some music that might prove suitable for David, Lyn heard the distant ringing of a bell.

"Tea-time!" summoned Kate from the hall.

Lyn washed quickly and joined her. As they entered Dame Isolde's room, Amlyth rose with a courtesy belied by the mockery of the question he threw at Lyn.

"So, Miss Heath, at the instigation of my mother you're going to victimize some child minstrel."

Startled by this attack, she couldn't answer for a moment. "The boy's grandmother and I agree that instruction will be invaluable for the lad," interposed Dame Isolde.

"Old Megan? Yes, she always was ambitious," conceded Amlyth. "But what about the boy?"

By then Lyn had her wits about her, as well as considerable righteous indignation. "You may be sure that if I can't interest a boy who has considerable talent, I shall admit it and give up this position."

Amlyth favored her with a cool smile. "And leave your Silver Room?"

"Of course!"

Shrugging, he spread his long, graceful hands. "Then let us trust this David from the mill cottage has some particle of his patroness's dedication, so that he will disappoint neither her, his grandmother, or his most ethical, charming teacher."

What a way to speak of one's son, as if he were a stranger. It made Lyn angrier than anything else Amlyth had said. She made no response to the mocking eyes that searched hers, except for the chilliest stare she could manage.

A maid brought tea, smiled at Amlyth, and withdrew. Kate poured out and passed around the scones with thick Devon cream, assorted biscuits, and tiny cress and cucumber sandwiches.

Corbie gobbled more than the rest of them put together and then curled up on his cushion by Dame Isolde's chair, like a well-fed pet content to doze through the boring conversation of his masters.

"Would you like to hear Miss Heath play?" Dame Isolde asked her son, in the way of one who is too proud for apologies yet wishes to conciliate.

"Indeed I would."

He cast Lyn a look of amused challenge as if suspecting she would refuse, but Lyn would not fall into that trap. After all, she was an employee. Making music was her work—and if it was a joy for her as well, that was her concern, not that of this unbearably arrogant man.

She made her way to the harp, adjusted the pedals, and played the first thing that came to her fingers, a medley of German folklieder. She followed it with "Lord Randal," a tale of another mother and son:

Oh, where have you been, Lord Randal, my son,
Where have you been all the day, my pretty one? . . .

To Lyn's astonishment, Corbie had crept over and was singing softly, in an unbelievably sweet tone, so different from his rasping speech:

I fear ye are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son,
I fear ye are poisoned, my pretty young man—

Dame Isolde's voice cut in stridently. "I can't abide that frightful old song! Here, Miss Heath! Let me teach you some ballads I doubt you'll have heard!"

The blind woman rose and came forward without hesitation till she neared the harp. She must have counted off those steps so that she knew how far she could move without hindrance. By then, Corbie was up and steering her to the bench which Lyn had vacated.

"I can only strum," Dame Isolde explained.

She did rather more than that, letting the notes wail and shadow or brighten her still-resonant, still brilliant voice.

Childe Maurice hunted Silver Wood,
He whistled and he sang.
"I see that lady coming
Whom I have loved so lang.

Here is a glove, a glove of silk,
All lined with fur it is,
It bids her come to Silver Wood
To speak with Childe Maurice.

And here is a ring, a ring of gold,
Set with the precious stone.
It bids her come to Silver Wood
And ask the leave of none . . ."

So the lady's jealous husband went to the wood and killed the fair young man, bringing the head home to his wife and bidding her fondle it all she liked. Then, to her husband's horror, she confessed that the young knight was her son, "born in mickle blood and shame" and brought up in a secret place in the Silver Wood.

"I don't find that song more pleasant than 'Lord Randal,' " Amlyth said when the rich, fraying voice finished. "Still, mother, it was beautiful."

"That is all that matters," said Dame Isolde, pleased.

"I cannot agree with that," he said, and they were speaking of something other than music or the song.

Dame Isolde rose, her hand resting on the graceful neck of the harp. "Leave me, Amlyth! You tire me —as always! But you stay, Miss Heath. Play for me a while."

Amlyth bowed over his mother's hand and escorted her to her chair. "Very well, mother. May your spirit find repose, at least for this day." He nodded to Kate and Lyn as he walked briskly out.

Lyn pulled up the bench and began to play. After a while, she started as Kate touched her shoulder. "That's wonderful. She's asleep, and after getting so provoked with Amlyth. We can go now."

They slipped out, leaving the old woman sleeping in her chair with Corbie at her side.

"You will be a real blessing," Kate told Lyn as they stepped out of the elevator. "And it was good for her to want to sing. She hasn't done that for ages."

Amlyth cleared his throat ostentatiously, rising from one of the carved chairs in the corridor. "What, not a sus-

picion that my return might rouse the old Valkyrie to melody? Kate, you wound me!"

"It would take a gun or knife to do that," Kate said with an edge of grimness.

Lyn kept remembering the echo of that raw, fearsomely beautiful voice, and the wailing chords which Dame Isolde had wrung from the harp. "It was like hearing one of the great old bards. She is a magnificent woman."

"And other things as well."

Amlyth came between Lyn and Kate, so that Lyn was half-trapped under the stairs while his hazel eyes played over her. Blood rushed to her face and a pulse throbbed in her throat. She had seen desire in men's eyes, admiration, cool appraisal, and friendliness. But she could not read the expression in Amlyth's eyes.

At last he smiled. Her breath came with such painful impact that she realized she had been holding it.

"The harp must be played from a certain angle for the musician to be graceful-looking -skirts, legs, all that, you know. Please don't be affronted, Miss Heath, if I suggest that you either arrange yourself or your audiences." He bowed and let her escape.

Cheeks burning, she joined Kate, who questioned almost sharply, "What did he say?"

"That I looked awkward at the harp."

"Nonsense."

"Oh, he's right enough, but I thought the room was so dark it didn't matter."

"He's still a cad to mention it." Kate tossed a baleful glance over her shoulder. It found no recipient. "Now, where did he go?"

"Perhaps he's gone to see his father."

"Trust Amlyth to set the house on its ears," groaned Kate. "He wants to put up a guard rail on his father's promenade. No need at all! Jock tags Mr. Drude just as his twin haunts Dame Isolde. Jock would never let him near the edge if he was having staggers."

"Jock is Corbie's twin?"

"Yes. They look precisely alike except that Jock wears flaming red." She gave an exaggerated shudder. "I'm glad

he never comes to this side of the house. We'd think a demon had appeared."

"The Twa' Corbies," Lyn said reflectively, recalling the macabre old ballad about a pair of ravens questing for their dinner and finding it in a knight treacherously slain. "Only our Corbie fancies Pontrefacts."

"They are a grotesque pair, but each is utterly devoted to his master or mistress. Corbie would die for Dame Isolde, and so would Jock for Mr. Drude. That's why it's ridiculous of Amlyth to raise all this pother."

Lyn had a moment's thought that a servant who would die for a master might kill for him, too, but she brushed the notion aside as one of the distorted, shifting half-truths evoked by such an old, historied house. She felt a great wave of exhaustion. It had been a tiring day, a constant test and strain of her emotions as well as her mind. Fatigue must have shown on her face, for Kate squeezed her hand sympathetically.

"Why don't you have a nice bath and nap for an hour? Dinner's at seven-thirty. If you'd like a drink first, we congregate in the small sitting room off the library at about seven."

"Thanks, I think I will have that rest," Lyn said. "You've been very considerate and helpful, Kate."

"Well, my dear, we have to help each other, don't we, especially with Amlyth back. Sleep sound" Kate waved and moved up the corridor in her smooth glide.

She seemed extraordinarily disturbed by Amlyth. Had there been something between them once? An unhappy love could explain why she hid her cool beauty in a secluded place like Belleforest where the only men were dwarfs, gardeners, and a drink-sodden old man. An unhappy love—or a hope that some day there might be satisfaction of a long cherished dream.

As Lyn opened her door, so near to Amlyth's, her mind buzzed with perplexities, the lives and puzzles of these people at Belleforest. To drive these thoughts out, and to recall her to her old self, she tried to summon up Aunt Adrienne's cheerful, motherly face, but it was superseded by Dame Isolde's. In desperation, Lyn even thought of

Morgan and of how his mouth had taken hers, but the pain she invited to jolt her back to reality strangely failed to come. Instead, Amlyth bent to her lips, an Amlyth no longer mocking, baiting, watching her as if she were one of his aborigines.

Folly! She must check any soft inclinations toward a man who could desert a pregnant girl and speak so calmly of a boy who was her son and his. Lyn ran the outsize old-fashioned tub half-full, splashed in bath oil, and soaked till her nerves unwound. Then, wrapping a towelling robe about her, she lay down on the green bed, facing the whispering copse of birches. The Silver Wood. Strange that Dame Isolde's ballad had such a forest. Strange. . . .

She drowsed. Then she awoke with a start and screamed. Outside the window a goblin face peered at her, a nightmare face though it smiled and one lid drooped in a long wink. A dwarf in red!

He vanished as her conscious mind recognized him as Corbie's scarlet twin, Jock, but her cry hung in the air and a sharp rap came at her door.

"Miss Heath! Are you all right?"

She belted her robe and opened the door as little as possible. "I'm—I'm terribly sorry!" she floundered. "I was sleeping and woke to see a little man who must be Jock staring in at me. I—I screamed before I remembered who he was."

The concern in Amlyth's eyes turned to a glint of mischief. "May I suggest, Miss Heath, that you draw your shades when resting by day? Sleeping beauties never know whom they'll attract—the great disadvantage, it seems to me, of being a sleeping beauty. Don't you find it so?"

"I'm sure I can't say," she replied with dignity. "In most cases I certainly would pull the shades, but I felt so protected with the birches close —"

"Put not your trust in birches," he warned lightly. "Jock was just curious, poor little devil, and stole a moment to view Belleforest's new songbird. Your name is Lynette? Then I hope you will allow me to call you Linnet, for apart from your music, there is something very birdlike about you—quick, alert, ready to fly. . . ."

She did not know how to answer him. Did he think she might amuse him during his stay at the house?

"Or I might call you Lily Maid," he continued whimsically. "Why not a fair maid of Belleforest as well as one of Astolat?"

"Her name was Elaine, not Lynette. Lynette was the girl who taunted Galahad for smelling like a kitchen knave."

"To be lessoned by an American on such fine points!" Amlyth had, damn him, a great deal of charm when he cared to use it. "Anyway, Lynette, too, went adventuring along Britain's dragon paths. But if you will not be my fair maid I will have a linnet!"

Before she could guess his intention, he carefully tucked a loosened strand of her hair in place. "Call me night or day if you have any more alarums," he invited. "And I hope to see you before dinner." With that he gave that hint of a bow, smiled, and crossed over the hall.

Lyn shut her door with more force than necessary and stood against it for a moment. If he planned to mount a campaign, she was extremely vulnerable in location. Had she been a fool to insist on the room?

Then she looked out at the birches and the speed of her heart quieted. She must stop letting this house throw her into archaic attitudes. She was no impecunious upper servant waiting timorously for the young master's pleasure, afraid to refuse, aware of a gulf that made honorable affection out of the question. Nor was she an Arthurian Lily Maid or a shy linnet. She was a professional musician, an American, an independent woman! If she kept these firmly in mind, Amlyth would be compelled to.

Too restless now to lie down, she sat down at the carved desk and began a long letter to Aunt Adrienne.

"Belleforest is enchanted," she wrote, knowing her aunt's delight in romances. "But whether it has bewitched its people, or they have magicked it, I cannot guess. Not yet—"

# CHAPTER V

Did the household dress for dinner? Lyn had forgotten to ask. She decided that she would be safe in a white satin shirt with soft ruffles and a long gingham skirt with tiered flounces caught with bows.

She thoroughly enjoyed the current fashion of romantic or exotic clothes so long as they suited the wearer. She had bought several such outfits in London, where skirts seemed either incredibly mini or swept to the ground. Doing her hair up with more care than she had taken since her break with Morgan, Lyn toyed with the thought of wearing it down, but since such a notion would never have entered her head had Amlyth not materialized, she rejected it sternly.

He was—interesting. But she had learned her lesson about faithless men.

Still, she felt a wave of disappointment when she passed through the library with its ceiling-high shelves stocked with old leather volumes and prestige paperbacks, to find that Amlyth was not in the sitting room.

Kate was pouring Bristol Cream for Dame Isolde, but Lyn remembered it as a very rich drink and asked instead for Dubonnet. Corbie was already gulping at a large cordial.

"Where is Amlyth?" grumbled Dame Isolde. "Surely he won't have gone off on his own for the evening without doing us the courtesy of saying so!"

"He was never the most reliable person in his habits," said Kate, sitting down with her sherry and sipping it.

"I suppose I really can't recall much about his ways," said his mother, touching her immaculately styled hair.

She had more life about her tonight, a kind of glow. "He was always at school except for holidays, and then we usually traveled. After he went to Oxford, he spent his vacations mucking about with some grimy fellow from the British Museum. I don't think he's spent a consecutive week at Belleforest since he came out of short pants."

Somehow he had found time during one of his short stays to seduce David's mother. A pity for her that he'd wound up at Belleforest long enough to get bored. If she had been some virgin of the bushmen or Masai she might have interested him longer.

Voices sounded in the library. "Right through here," Amlyth was saying.

The erect, white-haired woman of the mill cottage came in, making a near curtsey to Dame Isolde, though there was nothing servile in her manner. Wrapped in a fine-woven purple shawl, a strange contrast to her faded dress, she was, in her way, as queenly as the other woman. There was in her dark, fine eyes the quiet confidence of a woman who knew she could cope with life. One admired but pitied Dame Isolde. You could not pity this woman.

"Sit down, Megan," invited Amlyth, who was shepherding in the boy. "Mother, I met David and Megan gathering mushrooms and thought it would be pleasant for them to meet Miss Heath informally—chat with her together for a bit. I hope you agree."

"Indeed, yes," said Dame Isolde a bit wanly. "How are you, Megan?"

"Well, thank you, Dame Isolde." Megan looked with warmth at Amlyth.

Unnatural! Or did she not know his part in her daughter's grief? That seemed impossible.

One had only to look at the leggy, wiry boy with his mop of unruly hair, strong-arched brows, and long mouth to see that he was closely related to the tall man behind him. Even their frowns were identical, for David scowled and glanced about the small room, luxuriously furnished in French Empire, as if he were a young hawk flown by chance into a snare. And Amlyth scowled because—be-

cause, too late, he regretted his wrong to the boy's mother? Or because of what Megan was saying in her deep, rich voice, which had only a trace of local accent?

"And things must go very well with you, Dame Isolde, to have the young master back! He was telling us about the fine book he's writing, all on the strange folk he's lived with. Proper interesting it sounds."

"Really?" Dame Isolde's look at Amlyth said plainer than words that she hadn't known he was doing a book. "And you, young David, come here."

He lacked his full growth, of course, but even in his adolescent awkwardness there was a wild, free grace. He came slowly to stand before the old woman. Megan, who was near, constrained him to kneel so that the groping hands could find his face.

He bore their examination with frozen quiet, like an animal playing dead. Dame Isolde sat back with a deep sigh.

"Yes," she murmured. "Ah, yes, that's how it is."

"We're forgetting our manners," Amlyth said. "Megan, what would you fancy?"

"Port, sir, if it's easy."

He passed her a generous glass and nodded to David. "Lemon cordial? Orange? Black currant?"

The boy struggled between a wish for the drink and his plain desire to have nothing of that house. Amlyth put ice in a tall flagon and filled it with lemon cordial and water.

"You must wet your throat for the dry talking we'll have," he grinned, and put the drink into the boy's hand. "You know Corbie and Miss Roxborough. But you can't have met your beauteous teacher." He introduced Lyn to Megan and the boy, presenting Megan as Mrs Alworth.

Lyn shook Megan's firm hand and offered hers to David, who pretended not to see it. Lyn flushed, and said slowly, "Well, David, if you will not give me an even start, I cannot hope to teach you. Are you against the lessons?"

For the first time he really looked at her. After a moment he ducked his head and gave her hand a clumsy pump up and down. "I—I meant no offense, miss. It's

that—" He stared at Dame Isolde and broke off, scowling twice as hard as before.

She spoke wearily, as if she knew the words by heart. "You want lessons. But not at Belleforest. Not under my roof."

Megan looked at him sharply but he let the charge stand. More than ever he seemed to Lyn like a beautiful, wild thing, standing still but fearful among webs ready to tighten if he moved.

"One can't shift a harp about as if it were an accordion," said the mistress of Belleforest. "There is no point in learning on a cheap instrument of the kind one might place in the mill cottage. I shall assuredly not permit one of my priceless collection to be taken from my house." She gave the boy a frosty smile. "So we are at loggerheads. I see no use in further discussion."

David bowed, his face emotionless, but his hands were clenched tight behind him and his grandmother's eyes were a blaze of distress.

"Oh, aye, Davie, and pride makes a rocky bed that will cut your older bones! Here's this pretty lady all the way from America to lesson you. What's a wee walk to the great house when your music's inside?"

"I would walk by the mill stream and by the churchyard."

Megan winced, and then attacked with fresh vigor. "And what of that, my boy, what of that? If your mother could speak, she would tell you to learn the grand playing, to make something of yourself."

David looked from Dame Isolde to Amlyth to Kate and Corbie. "If my mother could speak, she might tell more. Then I might know who my father was that treated her so cruel instead of only guessing, as I do now, that he came from Belleforest. Groom, gardener, guest, or one of the Drudes? Who knows? I hate this house for my mother's sake."

Dame Isolde's hands plucked at her high collar. She closed her sightless eyes. Amlyth's reasonable tone was a

blessing, though how he could sound so benign and steady was a mystery to Lyn.

"You can hate the house, young David, but that should not keep you from taking what you need from it. You have told us how you feel. There is no deceit or treachery in your accepting lessons."

"Such scruples have seldom hindered anyone else from bettering himself," said Dame Isolde.

Again the boy seemed trapped. His gaze escaped toward Lyn, and she put a growing idea into words. "I've been using a small harp to teach beginners," she said. "It is called a troubadour harp and can be moved easily. David could begin on one of them in his house. I don't mind giving him lessons there, in fact I'd enjoy the walk."

"I shall not provide a new instrument when the finest are available here in my house!" cried Dame Isolde.

Lyn bit her lip. She did not have the money, or she would have gladly bought the harp and used it for other pupils after David.

How foolish this autocratic old woman was, grudging such a comparatively small sum after the amount she had freely volunteered to develop the boy's talent. It was not the money, of course, but a clash of wills, and in a strange, exasperated way Lyn pitied the blind woman in the throne-like chair as much as she felt for the slender, dark boy.

"I'll supply the harp," Amlyth said. "A troubadour sounds intriguing. Perhaps I might coax for a lesson now and then, Miss Heath? Anyway, give me the details and we'll have one at Mill Cottage as soon as can be."

"You always had an eccentric way with money, Amlyth," Dame Isolde murmured. "Buying extravagant gifts that I paid for in the end."

He shrugged. "You thus got an undeserved reputation for generosity, mother. But don't fear, I have money enough for several harps, even if the pound depreciates."

"But—if David takes his lessons at the cottage, I will not hear him—" The strong old voice wavered, and then came back with energy. "How shall I know he progresses? How can I tell if he is worth training?"

"That is Miss Heath's concern, is it not?" queried Am-

lyth. But he must have caught as plainly as Lyn had the note of forlorn longing in his mother's voice.

She was not simply being arbitrary and trying to bend David to her will. She longed with all the passion of her fierce, weathered heart to hear the music again in Belleforest.

"I'm sure David would rather you heard him after he has some practice," Lyn said with more confidence than she felt.

Amlyth crossed his arms and nodded. "Then it's settled. As soon as this troubadour harp can be got, you, David, will take lessons, and in due time my mother is entitled to a demonstration of your playing. I suggest a three month moratorium on questioning about David's progress, mother. With respect, no teacher can do her best if she is being probed and investigated."

"One would think me an ogre!" flamed Dame Isolde.

"Not at all, mother, you are only of the divine right cast of mind that equates its will with the Deity's."

Megan had put down her glass and risen. "We'll be saying good night then to all of you, and thanking you very kindly." She dipped her head and curtsied, but she was, in her way, as prideful as the owner of the magnificence surrounding them.

"Goodbye," David said. He added reluctantly, addressing anonymous space, "Thank you."

Amlyth saw them out, his voice a pleasant rumble down the hall, but when he came back to the sitting room, his mouth looked grim. Presumably, even he had a conscience. It was likely that he was trying to give his unacknowledged son some help. Lyn forgave him a little, but resolved to be on guard.

"Mother?" said Amlyth, and bent his arm to her. She stood very straight as she moved through the door with him so tall beside her.

It could have been a touching sight, the handsome, rugged young man matching his stride to his afflicted but regal mother. They did look royal, each strikingly self-possessed. But they did not speak as they led the way into the dining room, and Amlyth made no gesture of affection

as he helped his mother into her chair at the head of the table.

Corbie climbed atop a stool softened by a sapphire velvet cushion and surveyed them like a hobgoblin before he turned to his mistress.

"Madame, I'm hungry! Please ring to let that flighty Sally lass know we're here!"

The door opened. Sally came in, cheeks bright, blond hair fluffed warmly about her white neck. She carried a huge platter, which she placed near the carving tools on the sideboard. Then she whisked out and returned with a trolley from which she unloaded gravy, peas, mint jelly, onion sauce, and golden roasted potatoes. Mrs. Killigrew appeared and poured a wine Dame Isolde had ordered while Amlyth carved the lamb on to the plates and Sally brought these to the diners.

It was a hearty, delicious meal. To Lyn's surprise, Dame Isolde ate with an appetite that rivaled Corbie's. She ate neatly, though. One would not have guessed she was blind.

Amlyth had cut her meat for her in the way that Lyn was deciding was typical of his unparaded but constant concern for his mother. There must be left in him a lot of love for her, or a rigid sense of duty. But how could a dutiful man have ignored his responsibilities to a frightened, desperate, young country girl?

Lyn pushed away the riddle of Amlyth to answer Dame Isolde's questions about her home, her family, and what America was really like. Kate joined in, but Amlyth only listened with a faint smile. Corbie gorged. Twice Amlyth carved more lamb for the little man, who then heaped his plate with vegetables and devoured his third helping as ravenously as he had his first.

"I often think Corbie must be the fire god, Loki, born again," mused Amlyth, as Sally cleared the table. "Loki consumed everything in his path and only stopped when there was nothing left.".

"I've had enough roast," said Corbie with hauteur, "but I hope there's something nice for dessert."

As if conjured, Sally pushed in a trolley with several

delicious-looking desserts. "Sponge pudding," she announced, indicating an upside-down cake with treacle topping. "Cook made the trifle especially for you, Mr. Amlyth, with lots of strawberries and whipped cream. There's apple snow for anyone who fancies just a wee taste of sweet."

"I'll have a nice big lot of trifle," chirped Corbie, drumming his fork in anticipation. "And a large piece of sponge!"

"Corbie!" chided Dame Isolde. "You must not always try to be first! I let you get away with it, you naughty boy, when we're alone, but when we've others, wait your turn! Miss Heath?"

"The sponge looks very good," Lyn said.

Dame Isolde only wanted Turkish coffee. Kate had apple snow, and Amlyth took a large plate of the elaborately concocted trifle with its layers of vanilla wafers, gelatin, pudding, fruit, and cream. Lyn considered trifles an omnibus dessert and could never quite believe anyone over fifteen could like them, but Amlyth polished his off almost as eagerly as did Corbie.

They went back to the sitting room for coffee, which Kate poured into thin Meissen cups. "Does father never dine with the household?" Amlyth asked.

His mother's arm jerked slightly so that her coffee sloshed over the cup brim. Kate, with an annoyed look at Amlyth, gave Dame Isolde a clean saucer and spoke in a positive tone.

"Your father eats at such irregular hours that it is simply not feasible to gear meals to him, though he is always welcome, of course."

"You mean he's usually too drunk to eat," said Amlyth. "But alcoholics need food."

"Jock takes him trays," said Dame Isolde.

"Alcoholics need to be around people," went on Amlyth. "Otherwise, what incentive have they for breaking the habit that isolates them?"

Dame Isolde's face set in hard lines. "You are not going to rouse guilt in me over my husband's—unfortunate pas-

time, Amlyth! Especially since you have chosen to leave us here for years on end while you study aboriginal family patterns!"

"But at least my studies have taught me the endless malleability of human personality." Amlyth nodded toward his father's apartments. "I believe I can make a change in that pitiful, blasted man, even at his age, even with his pickled brain."

"Really?" Dame Isolde's laugh was high and brittle. "And how will you work this miracle?"

"I shall spend time with him."

"You think yourself a very potent medicine!"

"Human contact is, mother."

"Absurd romanticism!"

"Oh, I don't expect my company to turn the trick." His gaze came to Lyn and asked her a question. It seemed that he was trying to look into her core of self—though what right had he to judge others? "But I shall go along to the old boy with some of his favorite tobacco and banish Jock, that little red demon, for an hour or so each day. And I shall ask Miss Heath to visit him also, and perhaps young David will fiddle for him now and harp later."

Dame Isolde gripped one hand with the other. "You do not consider me a therapeutic person, I take it?"

"Obviously you have not been. Though the man is your husband, you have allowed this unbelievable situation to come about."

"You should not have to be reminded that your mother is seriously handicapped in her activities," put in Kate. "Most people would think it a husband's place to sustain her."

"But we are not most people, are we?" Amlyth's smile showed his strong white teeth. "We have contempt for people weaker, softer more human—than ourselves—when they fail to live up to what we expect. And no mere mortal can endure my mother's disapproval, which is quite literally withering."

"You make me sound like a fire-breathing monster!"

"You have breathed glory, mother. That makes monsters."

She gave an incoherent cry and gripped the arms of her chair. "So that is how my son comforts his mother!" she gasped. "Blaming me for that drunken fool's behavior, calling me a monster, accusing me of being inhuman! You are the one with no compassion, Amlyth! I don't think for a moment you're here out of concern for your father! You only came back to torment me!"

He watched her for a time, more sadness in his manner than anger, but with resigned implacability. "Good night, mother," he said, rising. He kissed her upthrust cheek and touched her incongruously bright hair. "Sleep well."

"This madness of trying to rehabilitate a sodden old man who would probably be senile if he were functioning—"

"At least one can improve his condition. I shall start by having the workmen build a guard rail along his promenade."

The fingernails of Dame Isolde's hands showed white as she grasped her chair. "Since you are acting like the master of Belleforest, Amlyth, may I assume that you intend to stay and manage the estate?"

"Any son might wish to keep his father from breaking his neck," returned Amlyth cooly. "I shall pay for the railing out of my own pocket. You should consider me only a visitor, mother."

"That is impossible! You will own Belleforest when your father dies! It's time you gave some thought as to what will happen to it."

"Why, you will live here, mother, to at least the age of one hundred. The future of Belleforest is the least of my practical worries."

She caught his arm. "The place means so little to you? You really never intend to settle here, raise children?"

"Who knows about that?" He turned a mocking smile toward Kate and Lyn. Then the smile died and he answered somberly, "I love Belleforest, mother, in the way I love you."

An eager, hungry look showed on the worn, elegant face. "How is that, my son? You love me? How?"

"In fear and trembling," he said from the door. Turning sharply, he walked out.

"Monster!" wailed Dame Isolde. But whether she was echoing Amlyth or upbraiding him, Lyn could not guess.

Kate rose decisively. "It's time for you to rest, Dame Isolde. Come, let's go up. Good night, Lyn."

"Good night, Kate," Lyn returned, also rising. "Good night, Dame Isolde. I hope you sleep well."

The old woman rose, placing her hand on Corbie's shoulder. He anticipated her movements much as a sensitive dog might be in rhythm with its master.

"I always sleep well, even if it takes brandy or drugs," said Dame Isolde. "Since you will not be starting with David till this abbreviated harp is obtained, please consider it part of your routine to play for me at tea-time."

"If you enjoy it, I'm sure David's lessons can be arranged not to interfere."

"You don't mind doing more than you're paid for." Dame Isolde nodded approval. "I like that."

"My salary is generous, Dame Isolde. Besides," Lyn added truthfully, "I love to play for someone who appreciates it."

"Bless you then, and good night."

Kate tossed back a smile and followed Corbie and Dame Isolde. Fortunately, the secretary did not seem jealous of the favor Lyn was finding in their employer's eyes.

Amlyth was the thorny one. And puzzling, too; a mixture of cold indifference and concern. Would he be like that with a woman he loved?

Lyn found herself walking faster as she passed his door. She pushed the bolt as soon as she closed her own, a little breathless, laughing and annoyed at her own uneasiness.

Whatever else one might think of him, he was not the sort to break into a woman's room or, in the deliciously shuddery old phrase, force his attentions on her. But as Lyn got ready for bed, she was highly conscious that he was just across the hall. She turned out the light and drew

the draperies to gaze out at the slender white trunks of the birches. Sir Ogier's love must have waited like this till he beckoned to her from the trees, but no one now walked the Silver Wood. . . .

Lyn started. A movement among the birches had roused her from her dreaming and she watched intently, heart pounding, half afraid. But whatever it was had vanished.

Perhaps she had imagined it, or it might have been a shadow on the moon or Thomas or someone from the village. It certainly was not a ghostly Sir Ogier or his murdered lady! Lyn got into bed, suddenly giving in to her weariness, which excitement had kept her from doing until now.

Corbie—Dame Isolde—Kate—Sally—Mrs. Killigrew —Thomas—David—Megan—these faces all swirled before her, settling into the one she had tried to deny.

Amlyth seemed to watch her with that mocking, questioning gaze, and though she knew he was anything but safe, the thought of him quieted her edginess so that her sleep was sound.

# CHAPTER VI

Lyn woke next morning to a tap on the door. Amlyth? She slipped on a robe, turned the collar high, and opened the door to find Sally there with a tray.

"Your tea, miss," she said, bouncing in with a steaming pot and an assortment of what Lyn would have called cookies in America but was beginning to recognize under the name biscuits. "Breakfast is at nine, unless you tell cook you prefer it earlier."

It would be a shame to refuse the tea and spoil Sally's effort. Lyn decided to at least give the national custom a trial. She thanked Sally and took the deep, comfortable chair by the window and tea table.

Diluting the strong tea with milk and sugar, she chose one of the chocolate covered whole meal biscuits and put her feet up on the ottoman, feeling pampered and luxurious. It was only seven-thirty. She had time for a wander-round before breakfast.

Sometime soon she wanted to find Elaine's bower, the trysting place back in the forest where Ogier had met the original dweller of this room, but that would take a longer excursion. This morning she could walk toward the mill.

There was another tap at the door. "Yes?" called Lyn, expecting Sally.

Amlyth stepped in. He closed the door quickly before she could speak, laying a finger across his smiling lips.

"Gently, Miss Heath! If anyone hears my voice in your room this early, they'll jump to all kinds of romantic but far-fetched conclusions!"

His dancing, hazel eyes challenged her. She decided to give him back as good as he gave, and prove she was not

an easily embarrassed young girl. She set down her cup and took another biscuit, regarding him with deliberation.

"If this is such a compromising situation, Mr. Drude, I'm surprised that you'd place yourself in it."

"Ah, the compromiser is always envied." He laughed as he sat down on the edge of her ottoman, his thigh almost touching her feet. "I didn't think Americans took morning tea."

"I never have before, but I think the habit could grow on one."

"Splendid! Always adopt the drink of the country, Linnet, in order to feel at home. In Germany, drink beer, in France, wine, and in England, tea! That's the surest way to my countrymen's hearts."

"That's what your mother says."

She wished he were not quite so close. It was much too intimate, she in robe and gown, with him only inches away. Besides, she hadn't done her hair yet and looked exactly as she had upon waking. Anyone who came in would be justified in thinking this visit improper. A disastrous thought struck her.

Supposing he thought American women were as instantly amorous as some movies and books portrayed them? Perhaps she should have sent him out immediately instead of trying to pose as an imperturbable modern woman who saw nothing strange in entertaining a virtual stranger—living, unfortunately, across the hall in her nightclothes! At least, thank goodness, there was nothing *femme fatale* about her terry robe and Peter-Pan-necked gown!

Still, in a peculiar way, Lyn felt a bit disappointed. If she had to be caught in nightwear, why couldn't it have been in her one glamorous, daring outfit, the beige body-stocking with a lace kaftan that Aunt Adrienne had given her last Christmas with the advice to see if she "couldn't find some appropriate time for wearing it"?

If Aunt Adrienne could have seen Amlyth just then, she would have either sent warnings or wished her gift were on her niece instead of carefully folded away. Lyn removed her feet from the hassock and Amlyth's proximity on the

pretext of pouring more tea, and put a solid question between them.

"You must want the information on the troubadour harp?"

"Yes, indeed." One dark eyebrow rose almost to the unruly tousle of auburn hair. "Why else would I presume to invade your chamber?"

She almost said that that did not explain why he had perched on the ottoman. But she bit back the retort, which might have invited more of his thrusts. She gave him the names of the harp maker and a London dealer who should have them.

He wrote these down in a leather-bound memo, not having to ask twice for a word or number. He nodded and rose.

"Thank you, Linnet. I'll ring this morning and see when we can get delivery." He paused a moment and smiled. "I'm glad you challenged tabu and kept this room Breaking old rules can clear out a lot of emotional clutter."

"Oh?"

"You bet! Tabus can get so burdensome they take all the joy out of life. Once in Hawaii it got to where the king and his subjects agreed that they couldn't go on with all the ritual avoidances, so they sat down and ate together, in great fear, breaking one of the strongest tabus. Most of them expected to be struck dead. But when they lived, got rid of some of their cumbersome rules, there was great rejoicing." He considered her a long moment, eyebrows raised quizzically. "So here's to breakers of tabu, Linnet!"

He went out, leaving her in full possession of the ottoman. She wondered whether he really had come in only about the harp, or whether he had cleverly seized on that alibi to mask any more personal aims he might have had.

She drained the teacup and set it down more firmly than necessary. From now on, she would investigate taps before inviting the tappers in! Now, if she wanted a walk before breakfast, she had to hurry.

She went out the side entrance beyond her door, hoping to find a different way to the mill than by the road. Thom-

as was edging the lawn, his face red above his gray mutton-chop whiskers. He pulled off his cap and straightened.

"Hallo, miss. A fine morning to be out!"

"A beautiful morning, Mr. Tidwell. Could you tell me if there's a way to cut through the woods to the mill?"

"Indeed there is, miss, and a pretty path it is, too, though overgrown now. Go through the walled garden, and straight from the gate to the forest you should find what used to be a bridle path. It will take you past the church and down to the mill, a half hour's walk if you don't linger." He winked. "Of course when young folks go that way together, it takes a sight longer!"

"I'm sure I'll make it in the half hour." Lyn laughed. She started to ask if he had been in the birches last night, but decided against it. The shadow, if it had really been there at all, had probably been caused by the moon. There was no point in starting rumors or getting a reputation for being nervous.

Saying goodbye to Thomas, she entered the birches. It was chilly in the shade. Lyn welcomed the warmth of the open space around the stable block. She paused inside the walled garden to breathe in the different ripening scents, and the good odor of rich, moist soil.

For centuries, food and fruit had grown here to feed the great house and its dependents. That eternal cycle of planting, maturation and use should go on for uncountable years, so long as there were men like Thomas who understood the earth. In the long run, who was most intimately bound to Belleforest, Thomas or Amlyth?

Passing out the other iron gate, Lyn went straight to the tall, dark trees. Sure enough, as Thomas had said, there was a reasonably clear path, though limbs, bushes, and vines had overgrown it in spots. It had been a while since any horse had gone through.

Kate had said Amlyth used to ride. Had he sometimes ridden down this way to meet David's mother? Had she run up the path from the opposite side, hoping, trusting, loving?

Lyn brushed her hand across her eyes to shove away the picture. Amlyth had been very young then, not more

than twenty— But the girl had been younger. And she had been the abandoned one, despairing of her life. That could not be changed, whatever tardy amends Amlyth might try to make to her son.

How deep the woods were! Sunlight gilded the tops of the trees and splashed down the limbs, but not a flicker danced on the ground, which was softened by last year's leaves.

Flowers nested in twinkles of white, blue, yellow, and rose among the dew-laden grass. It was the kind of ageless wood that inspired visions of Robin Hood, Morgan le Fay, wandering damsels, and knights errant.

Ogier must have idled here, holding his lady's hand. Perhaps they lay on some of the lusher patches of grass, their bodies crushing the flowers. And how many lovers must have strolled in this enchanted shade before Amlyth used this short cut to the mill!

The woods thinned and ended abruptly as if cleared to a certain point by woodsmen's axes. An old flint church sat on a knoll, tombstones jutting up in front of it. The church was rounded by a waist-high stone wall.

This was one of the few surviving old Saxon churches, built before the Norman invasion. Lyn had done enough sight-seeing and guidebook reading to recognize its plain, narrow lines and the simple, inverted roof.

She was lifting the latch of the gate when music streamed across the knoll. Lyn froze, frightened for a moment. But the sun was so bright and the music so reassuringly robust, not at all ethereal or ghostly, that she turned from the gate and walked around the churchyard toward the playing.

A boy sat under a pink-blossomed chestnut tree, violin pressed to his tanned cheek. David. He seemed so absorbed in his music that Lyn felt like an intruder and turned to go.

The music stopped. Lyn met dark eyes that stabbed deeply into hers. Her heart sank at his unsmiling face. If he thought she had come spying -

"I wanted to walk before breakfast," she almost stam-

mered. "When I heard the music, I just had to know who it was."

"This is common ground, miss." The boy had risen, holding his violin protectively aganist him, the bow clasped by one slender but well-muscled hand. "Anyone can come here, though they may not get buried in the holy ground. My mother's grave is yonder, under the wych elm. Is that what you came to see?"

"Of course not," Lyn said indignantly. "I haven't the slightest wish to pry." When his look remained hostile, she added forthrightly, "My business is with you and you only. But I can't teach you if you determine to think the worst of me. You don't have to like me, David, but you do have to trust what I say and do."

He considered her, his frown clearing slightly, the frown so like Amlyth's. "Why can't I learn from you if I don't trust you? I don't trust several of my schoolmasters, but I've learned their subjects."

"Music, as you know better than most, is not just another lesson. You won't credit my teaching if you're always watching me for tricks." Lyn decided to gamble. "Anyway, David, I won't teach you unless you drop this suspicion."

His eyes narrowed. "Don't you like Belleforest? It's a grand house much finer than anything in America, I daresay."

"I like Belleforest, but not so much that I'll take pay for a job I can't do properly, or spend time with someone who won't give me a fair chance."

They stared at each other for a few minutes. Lyn smiled then and David laughed reluctantly. "I believe you mean that," he conceded. "Anyhow, what you say is fair enough. Mind, I don't have to like you."

"Right," said Lyn, and put out her hand. They shook on their unusual agreement. Lyn glanced at her watch. "Goodness, it's almost nine, I've got to rush. But I think your harp will be here in a few days. Goodbye till then."

"Goodbye," he called after her.

Lyn hurried through the woods, too concerned with

being late this first morning to ponder deeply her encounter with David. On the whole, she congratulated herself on forcing the issue of trust. David's whole outlook toward the world would be tainted if he didn't drop some of his defensiveness; he needed to learn that people, to a large degree, would reflect back his attitude to them.

She entered the forest, hurrying. At least she wasn't wanted by Dame Isolde that morning and presumably could get a piece of toast or some fruit even if she missed breakfast. Still, she didn't want to start off by giving the impression that she was a slug-a-bed or an unpunctual person.

She could see the tunnellike opening of the path ahead when someone said, "Isn't it about now that a gruff voice asks, 'Where are you going, little Red Riding Hood?' "

Lyn jumped. Amlyth sat on a tree stump not far off the path, wearing russet slacks and a shirt that blended with the woods. Getting up lazily, he tossed away an apple core and came toward her. "Thomas said you were going to the mill, so I thought I'd join you for part of the walk."

"I didn't get to the mill." She decided to test his reactions to his past. "I met David outside the churchyard. He does play the violin beautifully."

"By his mother's grave?" Amlyth shrugged. "Well, I suppose a tragic and mysterious origin is no handicap to an artist. It merely objectifies the inevitable sense of being different."

"We're talking about a fourteen-year-old boy."

"We were all fourteen once."

"You won't try to compare your youth with that of a poor boy whose classmates must call him a bastard."

Amlyth laughed. "Certainly I thought I was a changeling. It's a staple belief of children who don't see how they could have issued from their insensitive, wicked parents."

"You take his problems very lightly."

"Linnet, bastardy in England is not what it is in your prim country. Here it has an ancient and proud role. Many of our noble families descend from kings' bastards. And from time out of mind our peasants and yeomen have got

infusions of lordly blood, and often with it some paternal favor of education or endowment similar to that your New Orleans gentlemen sometimes showed their mulatto offspring."

"I should think that in modern England the advantages of unacknowledged noble blood would be negligible compared to that of an honest name."

"Spoken like a true Yankee."

"I am *not* a Yankee. I'm from Virginia."

He swept a low bow, his eyes glinting mischievously. "I beg your pardon. So hard to remember these small colonial differentiations." They were out of the woods now and entering the walled garden, Lyn stalking ahead.

His hand came in front of her, barring her way. As she glared at him, he let his palm uncup, revealing several ripe, red strawberries.

"Truce? Forgiveness?" As she hesitated, he urged mock seriously, "You'd best not scorn them. Supposing all the food's cleared away?"

She had to smile at that. He popped the sun-warmed fruit between her lips. Lyn savored the delicious taste and texture, and accepted a second berry, a third, and the last

"Beguiled by strawberries," he teased, his long mouth quirking. "Could one buy your love with them, I wonder?"

Had he talked soft foolishness like this to the girl who now lay under the wych elm, denied holy ground? Lyn opened the gate without giving him a chance to do it.

"I am here to teach David. Love has absolutely no place in my present plans." He overtook her without effort.

"Plans were made to be altered."

She could think of no squelching retort, so said nothing. He said, "When a pretty young woman declares her own private moratorium on love, it means she's been recently burned." Amlyth kept his hand on the heavy brass doorknob that opened on their corridor.

"And what does it mean when a man your age has never married?"

She was startled at the sudden pain that stripped his

face naked for a second. She felt an odd compunction before she sternly reminded herself that he had probed, unforgivably.

"Please," she said, "do let me go in. I don't want to miss breakfast."

He opened the door and followed her.

Kate was loitering over coffee when they entered the dining room. "Good morning," she greeted, raising her slim brows a bit at seeing them together. "I've fended Sally off the kippers and bacon, but you'd better make haste."

"I walked to the old church, and it took longer than I expected," explained Lyn.

"When you fall in with Amlyth, walks do take longer," Kate observed with a dry smile.

"She was rushing back at such speed that I slowed her down for her health's sake," Amlyth said self-righteously. He took a silver cover off a hot plate. "Kippers? Bacon? Grilled kidneys? The eggs are still fairly nice."

Lyn took bacon, scrambled eggs, and toast and sat down opposite Kate, who poured the coffee.

"You haven't asked how your mother is," she admonished Amlyth.

"Should I?"

"It's the least you could do, since those workmen have been banging and shouting on the promenade since eight o'clock. Dame Isolde seems to be getting one of her headaches."

"I don't hear a thing from here," Amlyth said equably. "So I would suggest mother spend the day in the library or sitting room."

"You know that she has a regular pattern. It disturbs her to vary it."

Kate sounded very like a scolding wife. What was her relationship with Amlyth? He, at least, was untroubled. Tucking into his second batch of kippers, he gave Kate a direct look that sent her green eyes to her cup.

"Really, Kate, it's better for my mother to have a headache for a day or so than to hazard my father's falling off

the roof. Is this household completely daft? Anyway, Miss Heath will play for her this afternoon. That should mask the carpenter racket."

"Dame Isolde may have a migraine by then," Kate said gloomily. "When those come, she stays in the solar. Days on end, at times."

"Has she seen a doctor?"

"Not recently. She feels the migraines are a penalty of talent."

"They're much more apt to be allergic or psychological in nature," Amlyth stated. "I'll try to convince her that she should give this Harley Street specialist a go."

Kate eyed him with undisguised hostility. "You haven't changed, Amlyth. Hit and miss, here and gone, but always managing to stir up problems and make crises before you drift off and leave others to cope."

"Others being you?"

"Yes!" Spots of color flamed in Kate's smooth cheeks. Amlyth certainly knew how to shatter her remote, otherworldly facade.

"Still, it's a good job," Amlyth mused. "Apart from mother's personal whims, you rule Belleforest. What a dreamlike, unruffled existence it must be when you two are here alone."

"It's not my fault that you won't stay."

"No, that's true." His eyes held hers a moment. "You did try to persuade me to stay, didn't you, Kate?"

"I—I—" She pushed back her chair, tossing down her napkin. "What a hateful beast you are!"

"Cad? Bounder?" supplied Amlyth politely. "Never mind, sweet Kate. I'm sure mother will leave you all her convertible assets, and this old ruin is, as you well know, a nuisance to maintain."

"How can you talk like that about Belleforest?"

"My dear, it's easy. One simply leaves it for a while till it can be seen for what it is—a dragon-monster of weird beauty that consumes all it enfolds. It has swallowed you, hasn't it, Kate?"

"Nonsense!"

"Is it?" He leaned forward. "Could you live away from it?"

Her eyes dilated till they were black. "What—what do you mean?"

"Suppose I said to mother, 'I'll stay at Belleforest if you'll dismiss Kate.' You know she would battle but is so intent on having an heir at Belleforest that ultimately she'd send you away. And then, Kate, what would you do?"

She sprang up from the table. "You're wicked!" she cried. "Cruel and wicked!"

"But I shall inherit Belleforest."

The slim woman pressed her hands on the table, her hair a shimmering fall of silver-yellow about her shoulders. "You don't deserve it! What have you done to keep it going? I -I'd rather see it burn to the ground than belong to you!"

"But would you burn it, Kate?" asked Amlyth gently. "That is the question."

She stared at him, her hands clenching. Then she ran out, her heels clicking on the parquetry. Uncertain what to do, Lyn rose.

"You were certainly malicious," she told Amlyth.

"Sometimes that's a good way to discover interesting truths."

"Don't try it with me," she warned.

"I have other methods." He stared at her so intently that she turned her back to hide the rush of color to her face, and quickly left the room.

Laughter floated after her. She walked faster. He might half-court her now, but the biting edge of his words to Kate, as well as the callous way in which he had discarded David's mother, evidenced his true feelings about women. Women were merely entertaining pastimes who were not allowed to encumber him or make any claims. After that exchange with Kate, Lyn was sure Amlyth and the blond girl had been lovers, or on the verge.

At least she herself was well warned.

Hesitating in the central hall, she wondered whether she should go in search of Kate. But Lyn decided that the

other woman would prefer to ignore what had happened at breakfast.

This would be a good time to ask Sally for an iron and press out some of her clothes, which were rumpled from packing. Lyn collected the things and located Sally in the kitchen.

"I'll show you where the laundry is," Sally volunteered, rising from cutting X's on brussels sprouts. "But I'd be glad to smooth out your things, miss, soon's I finish these sprouts."

"I'm sure I have more time than you do," Lyn said. "But thank you anyway."

She followed Sally through a smallish, tiled room equipped with washing machine, dryer, and two sinks. Then they entered a narrow room which appeared to be blocked off the hall and which was filled to its edges by an ironing board, a mangle, a table with mending equipment, and two chairs. One large window opened out to face the woods, letting air and light stream in.

"It's a good place for ironing," Lyn said, pleased.

"It is, miss. I turn on me radio and get some jolly good programs."

"And you lean out the window to visit with the baker, butcher, dairyman, fish monger, and repairmen, not to speak of the gardeners!" Mrs. Killigrew loomed up behind them. "Oh, Miss Heath. Good morning to you! Do you require Sally for anything?"

"Not now, since she's kindly shown me where I can iron," Lyn said.

The housekeeper gave Sally a glance that sent the plumply pretty girl scooting back to her sprouts, and then stationed herself in the door.

This gave Lyn a feeling of being trapped, which she tried to shake by plugging in the iron and spreading a skirt over the board.

"It's another lovely day," she said, pressing out wrinkles. "Belleforest has much better weather than London."

"We're further south, miss." Mrs. Killigrew's pale, wrinkled face cracked in a smile. She spoke in a confidential tone. "You're liking the house, then?"

"It's very beautiful."

Mrs. Killigrew chortled, bringing color to her papier-mâché complexion. "Ah, that's not saying you like it, is it, my dear? You're a shrewd lass!"

"I haven't been here long enough to form opinions."

"That's right," approved the housekeeper. "And when you do form them, love, best keep them to yourself." Her overbright black eyes bored into Lyn, who felt ridiculously uneasy. "Just a word gently for your ear. Miss Kate doesn't have that catlike walk for nought, and Dame Isolde listens to her softest whisper."

"Miss Roxborough has been extremely kind," Lyn said stiffly.

"Yes, cats do rub against your legs till all of a sudden you've got a nasty scratch and don't know how it happened Miss Kate has had an eye for Mr. Amlyth too long to like the fancy he's taken to you. And Mr. Amlyth! He—" Lyn whirled.

"Mrs. Killigrew!" she burst out. "I will not listen to this gossip."

"Gossip!" Mrs. Killigrew squared her arms on her broad bosom and gave a snort of outrage. "Very good, miss! Pelt on and take your tumbles."

Mrs. Killigrew wheeled and stormed through the laundry, trailing almost palpable clouds of wrath. Then Sally ran in and almost collided with her.

"What is it, girl?" Mrs. Killigrew grabbed her and gave her such a shake that Sally's hair flew up and down. "Are you having a fit, running in like this?"

"The old master!" Sally panted. Her blue eyes were wide with terror and she began to scream.

# CHAPTER VII

Mrs. Killigrew administered several quick slaps. "What, Sally? What's happened?"

The girl caught a choking breath and obviously fought down hysteria. "The master's fallen! Pitched right off the promenade while the workmen were having a drop of tea in the kitchen!"

"And giggling with you, hussy!" Mrs. Killigrew would have given the girl another shake, but Lyn stopped her.

"He's dead," Sally wailed. "His neck is broke, they say, and he looks so queer and all smashed like a cat you'd see run over in the road!" She looked ready to start screaming again.

Grasping one shoulder, Mrs. Killigrew swung the girl around and gave her a mighty shove toward the hall. "Tell Mr. Amlyth and Miss Kate if they don't know we'll leave telling Madame to them. Has anyone called a doctor?"

"No, Mrs. Killigrew, I—I don't think so—"

"Then I will. Now be off!"

"I'll find Miss Roxborough and tell her," Lyn volunteered, catching up with Sally, who gave her a distraught look and rushed down Amlyth's corridor.

From outside Dame Isolde's door, Lyn heard Kate's pleasant, low-pitched voice reading. She tapped lightly and called, fighting to steady her voice, "Kate, can you spare a moment?"

There was a murmur, followed by the creak of the doorknob. Then Kate appeared, looking askance. Lyn drew her outside and down the gallery.

"What's the matter with you?" Kate said, sounding puz-

zled and a bit annoyed. "Dame Isolde was almost asleep and—"

"Her husband fell from the roof. He's dead."

"What?" Kate's fingers dug into Lyn's arm. "You—you must be joking!"

"Sally just told me and Mrs. Killigrew. Mrs. Killigrew's calling the doctor."

Kate's eyes widened, and then narrowed. "Amlyth! Where is he?"

"Sally's gone to tell him."

"Where is Jock? Why didn't he stop it?"

"I don't know. Would you like me to stay with Dame Isolde while you see what's happened and decide how to tell her?"

"I must see Amlyth." Kate leaned against the bannister and straightened with an effort. "Yes, do sit with Dame Isolde, please make some excuse for me. I—I just can't think how best to let her know. I hope Amlyth will do it, or maybe Dr. Hallenby—"

"Kate!" Dame Isolde's voice quivered with annoyance. "Come in at once! How do you expect me to remember the thread of that story, which is hard enough to follow even without interruptions? Tell Miss Heath she is not needed till tea-time!"

"Miss Heath will explain," called Kate. She cast Lyn an imploring look and fled.

Lyn took a deep breath. Her throat and mouth felt so parched that it hurt to swallow. The wraithlike old man she had heard of but never seen—and now she did not want to see what was left! How ironic that he should fall when finally a railing was being put up for his protection.

"Well, well?" shrilled Dame Isolde, straining forward like a chained monarch. "What is it, Miss Heath? Explain this uproar at once!"

"There was some matter Mrs. Killigrew felt she must consult about at once with Miss Roxborough." Lyn moved across the deep carpet, wondering if hypersensitive ears such as the blind were reputed to acquire could detect the sound of her steps.

How awful it would be, to sit like that and not know who was coming, even if you could hear them. Dame Isolde was indeed chained, chained by her infirmity. Any degree of helplessness would be a trial for such an imperious woman. At times she must find her life almost intolerable.

No wonder she snapped to assert her potency. "Mrs. Killigrew! When did her requirements preempt mine? Kate must be unhinged!"

Lyn picked up the book, surprised to find it a romantic best-seller. "Shall I go on with the book?"

"No," grumbled Dame Isolde. "Since you're here, you may play for me. Kate will finish the book in time she usually has off." And the old woman nodded her head over this petty vengeance in a way that roused both contempt and pity in Lyn. It pained her to see a woman of such stature behave like a spiteful child.

As she sat down at the harp, Lyn found that she was shaking. The truth of the old man's death had reached her physically, even though it was more like knowing that a ghost had destroyed itself and would walk no more.

"I would hear ballads!" Dame Isolde cried. "Songs with blood and grief and revenge, the old tunes of mankind! Do you know such songs, my young American friend?"

"Americans are learning them quickly," Lyn retorted. She had been in her late teens before the terrible difference between what America was supposed to be and what, in fact, it often was, came home to her. She had served as a volunteer musical consultant for Head Start and worked with a teen-age interracial orchestra, but she knew her country could no longer pretend that it sang a song purer and freer than humanity's ancient music.

So she sang of Lord Randal, poisoned by his true love, Sir Patrick Spens, sent to death by jealousy, and Edward, whose blade dripped with the blood of his father, before she slipped into Thomas Wyatt's love song for Ann Boleyn:

Forget not yet the tried intent of such a love as I have
met,

My great travail so gladly spent, forget not yet, forget not yet. . .

She was finishing when Amlyth came in. He stalked over to his mother and stared down at her, his mouth hard. Kate hurried in and caught his arm in warning appeal, but he shook her off.

"You have come, Amlyth." Dame Isolde made a statement, not a question. She lifted her face to him so that her throat made a proud, curving line, and she seemed almost young, wholly regal. "I feel your anger. It beats through the air. Why?"

"You don't know, mother?"

"What should I know?"

A sigh shuddered through him. Shaking his head, he muttered under its breath, "If I knew what to believe!" He took Dame Isolde's hands, and Lyn noticed that he placed his fingertips under her pulses.

"Mother. My father has fallen—or been pushed—from the roof. He is dead."

Her chin swung up. She sat frozen for a moment. Then her eyelids began to flutter wildly and she tried to rise, groping for Amlyth's face. He held her questing fingers away, watching her. She began to pant. Shrieks tore from her.

Amlyth gripped her shoulders tightly. "Mother! Mother. Stop that. You *can* stop. Damn you, talk! Did you have anything to do with it?"

She laughed with a ring of madness. "I? After enduring his sottishness all these years? Why should I kill him, Amlyth? No! It is I who must ask you—did *you* do it? Have you decided to come early into your patrimony?"

He let her go so violently that she fell into her chair, laughing and sobbing.

"I?" he asked slowly. "You think I would kill my father?"

Kate got protectively in front of her mistress. "She's as much right to think that as you have to blame her! Good heavens, Amlyth, what a brutal accusation to make at such a time."

"It is a question, not an accusation. Doesn't it seem strange that he fell when something was being done at last to rule out that fatal possibility?" He gazed down at his mother. "So long as there was a good chance he might accidentally plunge, it might have seemed feasible to leave it to heaven. But with a strong railing –"

Kate's lips peeled back from her teeth and her eyes blazed. "But how clever it would be to divert suspicion by insisting a rail be built! After such a demonstration of filial concern, who would suspect you?"

"Ah, sweet Kate, you would have made a fine criminal barrister." Amlyth studied her with speculative interest. "Perhaps you can explain why Jock didn't guard his master with his usual success."

"No more than you." Kate's eyes glittered emerald hard. "You've got more explanations to make than anyone, Amlyth. You would do much better not to stir up trouble."

"But if I caused this death, surely you want me brought to justice?"

Kate nodded towards Dame Isolde. "Why should she have her heart broken for a derelict who in any case had only a few years left?"

"Most generous of you, Kate," nodded Amlyth. "What's murder, after all, so long as it's in the family and the survivors agree no harm was done?"

"Murder? It's you who began that! The old man fell. If we all accept that, there's no problem."

"But if I'm awkward, it can be made to look very bad for me?"

"Damn you, you keep saying all these horrid things. You're inhuman! Upsetting your mother like this—causing trouble—"

"Building railings—"

Kate swung her arm back and struck him across the face with surprising force. White splotches raised on Amlyth's cheek, slowly outlined with red.

"I have called the police, too," he said. "I'll go down now to wait. Perhaps you should give my mother a seda-

tive. The police can question her later if they feel they must."

Swinging on his heel, he left soundlessly. For such a large man, he walked with astonishing quiet. Lyn had a vivid sense impression of him moving lithely along the roof, and coming beside or behind a wavering, shaky old man. Just a touch the slightest throwing off balance—

"He won't get anywhere with that nonsense," Kate told Lyn. "Dame Isolde and I have been right here since lunchtime. He must be out of his mind to even suggest it was anything but the accident it obviously was." She smoothed Dame Isolde's shoulder. "It's a shock, madame, but you must not make yourself ill over it. Come, let me give you a sleeping pill and massage."

She helped Dame Isolde up; for the first time Lyn noticed that Corbie was not there. Perhaps he was consoling Jock, his twin.

Dame Isolde pressed her hands to her forehead, driving her fingernails into the flesh. "My head! I must get to the solar. Miss Heath! Give me your arm, too. Hurry—my head, it's bursting!"

"One of her migraines," Kate whispered. "Let's get her upstairs."

Dame Isolde gave a stifled cry and shook as if wracked by nausea when the elevator started. The two younger women almost had to carry her to the low cushion-strewn couch in the center of the room. Then Kate pressed a switch that stretched a sliding panel across the ceiling so that the skylight was totally darkened.

"No pillow," she groaned. "No no—don't touch me! Send Corbie! Where is he? He's not supposed to leave me!"

"I'll send him," Kate soothed. "And Dr. Hallenby had better look in on you while he's here."

"I don't want him. What can he do for these headaches? Are the curtains drawn? Everything looks red and orange."

"It's quite dark, Dame Isolde."

The suffering woman pressed her palms to her eyes in a convulsive motion and then lay still. Lyn started forward

but Kate touched her arm and nodded toward the elevator.

"She can't bear any sound or light when she's in one of these," explained Kate when they were descending in the small cage. "But I will send the doctor up in case the other shock has caused any extra troubles. Damn Corbie! He's underfoot worse than a dog except when you need him!"

"He may be with Jock."

Kate made a face of disgust. "Pair of little demons!"

"Has anyone seen Jock? Did he see it happen?"

"The man saw Jock close to Mr. Drude when he fell. There's no mistaking those red clothes and dwarf's body. But Jock hasn't come down. Fears he'll be blamed, no doubt—and rightly!"

"He must be grieving," said Lyn.

Kate flashed her a look of bright scorn. "How could anyone love that drunken old wreck?"

"Don't you think Corbie would remain devoted to Dame Isolde even if she became an addict of drugs or drink?"

Kate's jaw dropped in astonishment as they stepped out of the elevator into the central hall. "Surely you wouldn't compare a genius like Dame Isolde, a unique woman of rare brilliance and gifts, to that miserable creature who has hung about her neck like a millstone!"

"More like an albatross," Lyn retorted for no reason except the memory of how the guilty mariner had been cursed with the murdered bird's corpse.

Not deigning to answer, Kate crossed to the huge front door. Lyn followed her out past the Viking ships and around the flower-bordered flagstone walk to the end of the house.

A sheet lay over a sprawled form, about which a knot of people hovered. Among them were Thomas and two gardeners, Mrs. Killigrew, Sally, Mary, the other maid, two workmen who must have been making the guard rail, a fat woman in white who must be the cook, and a police constable who was asking questions and glancing at the roof, where the unfinished railing stood like an accusation.

Amlyth stood to one side with a small ruddy man whose

spiky brown beard and rather large pointed ears gave him the look of a benevolent satyr. He held his black bag as if it were an extension of his arm. Breaking off talking as the women came up, he shook Kate's hand and looked with open interest at Lyn.

"I'm sorry we meet at such a time," he said after Kate had introduced them. "Even so, it's a pleasure. Shall I go up to Dame Isolde now, do you think, Kate?"

"She's in one of her migraines and is resting in the solar," Kate said.

Dr. Hallenby stroked his beard, pointing it even more. "An injection might help her. She shouldn't be alone, of course."

"She wants Corbie. He's vanished, the little wretch!"

Amlyth spoke for the first time. The print of Kate's blow was still faintly visible. What had Dr. Hallenby's shrewd mind deduced from that?

"I'll see if he's with Jock in my father's apartments. You may need to give Jock something, too, Doctor, if you'd kindly stop by after you've checked my mother." He turned to Lyn. "Would you come up with me?"

Startled at the appeal in his eyes, a trifle embarrassed at the lift of Dr. Hallenby's tufted brows and Kate's shocked look, Lyn moved after him.

"Just a moment, please, ladies!" It was the sandy-haired young constable hurrying forward. "I'm Constable Leyland, and I'd like you to tell me whatever you know about the—accident."

This was quickly done. An ambulance flashed up, but the doctor waved Amlyth on. "I'll see to this, old chap. You find Jock and Corbie and I'll be along presently."

Amlyth led the way through a side door into a corridor Lyn had not explored but which she could see led out to the main hall. Turning left sharply up a flight of stairs, Amlyth stood back to let Lyn precede him.

"My poor father only traveled down these stairs to the cellars," Amlyth said as they paused for breath on the second landing. "He's been dead in his spirit for years, Linnet. I never expected to mourn for the death of what he had become—"

Lyn wished she knew how to offer acceptable sympathy to this unpredictable man. "At least it must have been a quick, painless death."

"Oh, yes. Very sudden, unexpected." Amlyth's mouth twisted crookedly. "Unshriven, unblessed. Tell me, Linnet. If you were to murder a person, would you give him warning—let him make preparations, do final chores, pray? Or would it be merciful to kill quickly and spare him the dread?"

"I—I—" *Could* Amlyth have shoved his father? Lyn's throat sealed at the thought.

She stood on the landing, two steps higher than Amlyth. Their eyes were level, but she was even more aware of the breadth of his shoulders. If he ever grew heavy, he would be a massive person. Her mind twittered frantically in all sorts of inane directions to shut away the terrible fear that he might have killed.

He put his hand to the back of her head and touched the base of one braid. "My Linnet, you are like Ophelia, strayed into a web of lies and hatred. Are you honest? Are you fair?"

"This is hardly the time for Shakespeare."

"But it is, for my namesake long ago met his Ophelia in the woods and she perished rather than betray him. Besides, Linnet, Shakespeare holds a mirror for me. 'I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious. . . . What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?' " His hand dropped and his tone hardened. " 'We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us.' "

Was he mad? Lyn turned swiftly, making her voice matter of fact. "We'd better hurry and find Jock and Corbie."

Amlyth's words followed her. "And in still another way I am like Hamlet. It would have been much, much better had my mother never borne me. I am not the right person to be her son."

"There's nothing anyone can do about choosing children or parents."

Amlyth gave a small chuckle. "Spoken with true American pragmatism. Hitler had a mother. And so did Lizzie

Borden. Contrary to what is comfortable to believe, murder is usually in the family."

"Stop it!" Lyn whirled on him, clenching her hands, surprised at her own violence, close to tears. "I don't know why you torment yourself like this, but don't do it around me!"

"Why?" A curious light showed the black markings in his hazel eyes, so that they seemed to swell, draw her toward him, and make her weak, dominated by his gaze. "Why, Linnet?"

She could only stare, moving her head wordlessly. Too much was happening; it was a dream and his father's death a nightmare inside that dream. With amazing gentleness, Amlyth took her hand and brought it against his cheek for just a second.

"You will not be harmed," he promised. "I swear to you that you will be safe if you play your harp, teach David, and keep clear of traps the rest of us set for each other." He turned her about and gave her a slight push up the stairs.

Lyn ran up the two remaining flights and found herself standing in a gallery like that outside Dame Isolde's door. She judged that she must be somewhere beyond the solid wall that blocked this part of the house off from the rest. Amlyth opened the huge single door. Lyn saw past him.

A small, red figure lay in a pool of darker red. The head was almost severed, as if the lax, outflung arm had chopped hard and then recoiled, still holding the long broad butcher knife.

Lyn gagged, leaned on the door, and started to scream.

# CHAPTER VIII

A large hand closed over her mouth. Edging into hysteria, she struggled till Amlyth's voice and arms quieted her, even though she knew he might be a murderer. And this—?

"Look away," Amlyth said gently. "Step just over here and look out toward the woods. I don't want to bring the servants running."

"But—you'll tell the doctor and constable?"

"Of course! But first come, first look."

Lyn leaned on the window sill, able to see the church beyond the woods. Beyond the church, to the side of the main road, she could see the mill cottage.

It looked a fairytale country where witches might gather nettles in the churchyard or a fair miller's daughter fall in love with a prince. But in fairy tales, the lovely peasant married the king's son. At Belleforest, she killed herself. Because of this man who now took it for granted that Lyn would trust him.

Turning to the door so that she did not see Jock's body, Lyn said, "I'm going to tell Dr. Hallenby."

"Fine." Amlyth's tone was matter-of-fact. "Corbie must be with my mother. I think we should let the doctor tell him. He and Jock were one soul with two bodies. This will be a devastating blow."

Lyn gripped the door frames. "Why did Jock do this?"

"The obvious reason is guilt at not saving his master. I'm no expert, but I should guess Jock's been dead almost as long as my father. He must have run in here and cut his throat. Poor little devil!"

Lyn shuddered. "Why did he do it? It couldn't bring his master back."

Amlyth loomed in the door, following her down the gallery to the stairs. "What people do in vengeance or regret has little to do with rational behavior. Our Twa' Corbies were each extraordinarily devoted to his master or mistress, but they loved each other with kinship bonded tighter by shared deformity. We will have to be careful for Corbie for a long time." As they stepped outside, Amlyth brushed Lyn's hand in a brief, comforting gesture.

"Find Dr. Hallenby. I'll have a word with the constable."

Lyn checked Dame Isolde's large sitting room, but there was no one there. She hesitated to go to the solar, but Corbie and the doctor were probably there. Riding up in the elevator, she decided to motion to the doctor from the elevator cage and wait there till he could come to her.

When the elevator opened on the solar, Lyn was shocked again at the darkness of the formerly light flooded upper room. She made out Corbie huddled against Dame Isolde's couch. Kate and Dr. Hallenby were talking softly, half-hidden by the largest harps. When Lyn beckoned to them from the elevator, they came quickly.

"Something—" She remembered Jock. Nausea shook her again and she pointed below. "I'll tell you somewhere else."

"My dear Miss Heath," Dr. Hallenby said, taking her hands as they traveled down. "What is it? Amlyth? Jock?"

"Jock. He—he hacked his throat with a knife. Up in Mr. Drude's place."

"Dead?"

Lyn nodded.

"Where's Amlyth?"

"He went to tell the constable."

As they stepped into the central hall, Kate's eyes glittered. "It's too much! Just too much! Belleforest turned into a slaughterhouse! Dame Isolde mourning and sick over an old hulk she hasn't even spoken to in years! And now Corbie will lose what little mind he has!" Her rising voice

shattered into a wail that was more scream than words. "It's too much!"

"Kate, love." Dr. Hallenby led her to one of the big, stiff chairs. "Compose yourself. Dame Isolde will recover. Her constitution is steel, not iron. As for Corbie, I suppose the best thing is for me to tell him out of his mistress's hearing and judge by his reaction if special precautions need be taken."

"But Dame Isolde needs him when she is like this! He's the only person she can bear to have near her."

"One can scarcely conceal a brother's death for the convenience of a self-willed woman," said Dr. Hallenby with a touch of frost. "You're overstrained, Kate. Go to your room and take a long soak in warm water. I'll see how you are when I've been to Jock and Corbie."

"But Dame Isolde—"

"My dear Kate, you're no good to her if you break down. She'll sleep or drowse the rest of today, and I'm sure Miss Heath will hover around if it seems necessary." He raised his tufted eyebrows at Lyn.

"Of course I will," she promised. "I'll be glad to do whatever I can."

Kate's eyes still sparkled feverishly. She was no longer the calm naiad of their first meeting. "Oh," she flamed at Lyn, "I'm sure you will be very glad to help! It's easy for you to come in fresh and act superior and above it all—"

"Kate!" thundered Dr. Hallenby.

She gasped and fled. Shrugging, the doctor turned to Lyn. "Sensitive girl, Kate, and all this after years of genteel monotony has understandably made her feel as if she's been dragged through a hedge backwards. Try to make allowances." He gave Lyn a fatherly pat on the shoulder. "Can you freshen up, get a snack, and meet me here in fifteen minutes?"

Lyn nodded.

"Good girl," he said approvingly, already starting down the corridor that led to Mr. Drude's rooms. "Come prepared to stay a while."

Sickened at remembering what he was about to see, Lyn sat down for a moment with her head pressed between her

knees till she felt better. Then she hurried to the kitchen and, finding no one there, made a sandwich and drank a glass of milk. Next she went to her room and put overnight necessities in a tote bag in case getting back for them should be difficult. It was exactly fifteen minutes when she entered the main hall as Dr. Hallenby trotted up.

"Ghastly," he muttered, wiping his face, which had a gray cast beneath its high color. "I've seen people cut their throats before, but Jock evidently tried to behead himself —poor creature, in his grief and shame at letting his master fall, he must have decided to be his own judge, his own executioner."

"You believe it was an accident, then?" asked Lyn with great relief.

"Certainly, my dear—granted, it was a preventable one. As I told Amlyth, a rail should have been put up long ago, even if the promenade hadn't been an alcoholic's exercise space. It's bound to make a splash in the press, especially with this frightful thing of Jock, but the constable agrees with me that the fall was mischance, and Jock a suicide, though of course they'll check the knife for fingerprints and take all the routine precautions observed in the case of violent death."

His brisk, sensible tone steadied Lyn as the elevator purred to the top of the house and halted for the solar.

"I'll take Corbie below to break the news," explained the doctor. "If he's all right on the whole and wants to stay with his mistress, I don't see why not. Neither is going to be in any mood for conversation, and mute sympathetic company is probably what each needs for a few days. However, if Corbie is simply in no condition to be with Dame Isolde, you would rub her less than Amlyth. Sally or Mrs. Killigrew would infuriate her, and she simply would not tolerate most outsiders. Kate must get hold of herself before she can resume her duties. I'm going to try to send her up to London. So may I count on you if needs be?"

"I'll do my best."

"Splendid!" The doctor was looking more his hearty, urbane self, and Lyn was not sure that his hand on hers

was completely professional or paternal. "Just wait while I tell Corbie, and use common sense if Dame Isolde does rouse enough to miss him."

Lyn stood by the Viking harp while Dr. Hallenby crossed silently to the couch. Dame Isolde never stirred but lay with an ice pack on her forehead. The doctor bent to study her, gave a slight nod, and put a hand on Corbie's hunched shoulder, laying a finger across the tiny man's mouth at the same time.

Jerking erect, Corbie seemed about to attack the doctor with teeth and nails, but after a spasm of checked movement, the black-clad dwarf stared angrily at the visitor.

"You must come out for a moment," Dr. Hallenby said under his breath.

Corbie hitched nearer to his prostrate mistress. "I won't leave her!" he hissed.

"You must, my man, and no more nonsense!" Dr. Hallenby, with surprising strength, brought Corbie to his feet and propelled him toward the elevator. "Dame Isolde is heavily asleep and Miss Heath will stay with her till you come back."

"Why—"

"In with you, that's a good lad."

The panel slid shut and they vanished. Lyn, fervently hoping that Dame Isolde would sleep till someone else was present, took a cushioned monk's chair in the lightest part of the darkened room, where some errant light filtered in at the edge of the skylight shutters.

The harps stood about the sleeping old woman like enchanted slaves, thralls of her power. Lyn gazed intently at the pedestal of the Viking harp, at the woman with her calm, lovely face and proud head oblivious of the dragon coiled at her feet.

Whoever had made that harp had put together serenity and danger, beauty and horror, and from the string running from the woman's back-stretched arms to the dragon's body, had created the frame for melody, bright, brilliant sound struck from degrees of tension.

A magic, mystical harp as old as the Drude family; if there were in these days a family *skald,* what songs he could make of this day's happenings! And how would he spin them out, how would he shape the destinies of those surviving?

Would David be the new young hero, overcoming his shameful birth? Would Amlyth make peace with his heritage and raise up children at Belleforest? What of Kate, and tragic, haughty Dame Isolde, swathed in her pride and blindness like an ancient seeress whose wisdom could not save or cheer her or lighten her night?

*And me?* Lyn wondered, finding relief in the game, cupping her chin in her hand and curling her feet under her. A wandering gleemaiden from a heathen tribe, woven briefly into the tapestry, a background figure remarkable only for being an outlander?

But a gleemaiden might look through her harp strings at the young lord of the house. She might make a song that would live longer, much longer, than any of the nobles or all their loves and hates.

Nonsense! Lyn gave herself a mental shake and sat up straight. She was a twentieth-century woman who earned fees, not whatever those she taught or entertained chose to bestow. Certainly she would not eat out her heart in loving anyone.

That was an outmoded fashion of times when dying of love or pining for the rest of one's life was considered romantic and possible.

No one had time or energy for such exaggerated private passions any more. If you saw you were starting down a dead end, you went back, however painfully, to the main road and took another way.

Deciding cost pain—she remembered, with a detached wonder, how it had hurt to cut free from Morgan. But once you had acted, blown up your bridges, where was there to go but in another direction, and that quickly?

Dame Isolde moaned softly and moved a bit, reminding Lyn that people at Belleforest operated under old rules,

had a different set of mind and way of action. Amlyth had said it—proud, revengeful, ambitious.

You should go away, Lyn's mind told her. Go away before you're caught in the tapestry and can't break the threads. These are not your kind of people, you don't understand them, you can only find trouble.

Yet something in her, deep rooted, primitive, wordless, clung to Belleforest with its antique code and its archaic folk who made normal people seem dull and colorless.

Even if Lyn left tonight, the memory of Dame Isolde would always hold a prominent place in her consciousness, and would influence the way in which she would try to meet adversity. She would always be haunted by the ghostly old man she had never met, by Jock, violently dead, and by Corbie. And she would always remember strong, capable Megan, and David with his music under the wych elm.

Go away? Have no share in their futures, especially in shaping David's? Try to forget the Silver Wood, never again by chance meet Amlyth or taste a sweet, fresh berry he had picked for her?

Watching the old mistress of Belleforest surrounded by the mute harps in this highest tower, Lyn had to face and accept the fact that she did not want to go. In this short time, her fate had become entwined with that of Belleforest.

For grief or joy, she had already taken her place in the tapestry.

She put down her feet and sat as straight as Dame Isolde, admitting her position but asserting her will. This was where, for a while, she would play out her life, but it would be by her rules, not as a pawn. Beside Amlyth, Morgan had become a dim shadow, but she did not have to become another of Amlyth's amusements. A sudden thought shook her.

What if this tragedy of his father sent him off again? He had talked as though doing something for the old man had been his principal reason for coming back. On the other

hand, now that he was the surviving Drude male, he might settle permanently.

He'll do what he pleases, Lyn thought. In any case, my job is to teach David. Yes, every day to hear that voice and see that face so like Amlyth's.

Rubbish! David was very much his own person. He was no faint echo of Amlyth. By the time she taught him all she could, he would be a match for his birth and for whatever the world might send him.

No longer able to sit still, Lyn wandered among the harps, longing to hear what notes she could get from the old Egyptian bow harp, the Viking one, or the curious, almost horseshoe-shaped instrument, carved with beasts and mortals, that had belonged to an Irish king.

What a sound it would make if they all played together —this diverse family tracing its lineage back to the bow of some ancient hunter who had heard music when he released the taut string! Lyn touched the royal Irish harp as if it might shriek warnings to its master like those in fairy tales, smiled at her own fancy, and jumped when Dame Isolde spoke quite distinctly.

"Who is there?"

"I—I—"

"Miss Heath?"

"Yes, Dame Isolde." Lyn went to stand by the couch, frantically wondering how to answer the questions that were sure to come. If only Dr. Hallenby would come, or Amlyth! It was too soon to hope for Kate, of course. "Is your head better?"

"My head?" Dame Isolde swung her legs off the couch with an ease that made Lyn realize that only her sight was damaged, that she was otherwise a strong, vital woman for her years. "My head is fine. Have you come to play for me, my dear? I don't remember telling you to come to the solar—indeed, I don't remember coming up here at all!"

"Kate brought you up."

"Did she?" Dame Isolde's laugh was a touch unpleasant. "She wanted to go off on some business of her own, no doubt, or try to tempt Amlyth into courting her again. You would think the silly girl would realize that no love is

so dead as a hot, wild one after it burns out. Never mind! As soon as you've sent for tea—just push the buzzer by the elevator three times, that's our tea signal I shall enjoy hearing you. On which harp will you play?"

Stunned but relieved by Dame Isolde's apparent blacking-out of her husband's death, Lyn pressed the buzzer three times and decided that Dr. Hallenby must judge about telling Dame Isolde what had happened. For the moment, she was glad to go along with the amnesia, or whatever the merciful clouding was.

"I'd be afraid to play the old harps," she told Dame Isolde.

"Every instrument here is restrung as necessary. My London expert comes every six months, tunes and plays each one, and does whatever is needed to keep them able to perform their duty."

Only Dame Isolde would regard instruments as having duties. Only she would go to the trouble and expense to have museum pieces kept at performance level.

"I would love to help your expert tune if I might," Lyn said. "It would be wonderful to listen to the strings and get to know each harp. But until I know which ones I can play, I'd better use a double-action, perhaps this beautiful Erard."

She sat down to it, adjusted the pedals, and began to play, keeping to light, rippling music, sunny and tranquil. She played Debussy's "Afternoon of a Faun" and Dvorak's "Carnival Overture." How merciful it would be for Corbie if he, too, could forget what had happened to his brother! But he would have to know, since he saw Jock often.

The death of Mr. Drude would make no real change in Dame Isolde's life. Her invisible husband would merely cease to walk the high roof on the other side of their wall.

As she played quieting songs for Dame Isolde, Lyn grew calmer, too, but she still hoped that Dame Isolde would stay in her peaceful lapse till the doctor, at least, came back.

"Where is Corbie?" Dame Isolde asked so suddenly that Lyn's fingers struck a lingering wail from the strings.

What could she say that would not jar the older woman into trauma? "He just went out for a few minutes," Lyn fended desperately. "I promised to stay till he got back."

Dame Isolde gave an unaristocratic snort. "Corbie hates to leave me. He's very jealous, especially of you, Miss Heath." She rapped with her knuckles on the carved arm of the couch. "Something's going on! What is it?"

"Dame Isolde—"

"Where is Corbie? Where's Kate? Why can't I remember coming up to the solar?"

"You got a migraine, Dame Isolde, and that was when you came here. Please try not to excite yourself, or you might be ill again."

"You sound just like Kate," grumbled the old woman, but she seemed somewhat pacified. "I suppose I must be glad I wasn't forgotten entirely! Where's my tea?"

It would probably be days before the kitchen got back to normal. "I'll buzz again," said Lyn. When she reached the elevator, its door opened and Mary brought in a tray. The girl approached her mistress breathlessly, with rounded eyes.

"Good afternoon, madame. Shall I pour?"

"In spite of the Americans' historical aversion to tea, I trust I can rely on Miss Heath to deposit the brew in my cup instead of Boston Harbor. Are you badly overweight, Mary?"

"Oh, no, madame!" cried Mary in wounded pride. "I've been on a diet, I have. Only weigh ten stone now, but I'm fair starving."

"You also pant like a porpoise, my girl. Better ride your bicycle or walk till carrying a tray doesn't make you sound as if you were scaling Everest!"

Mary bobbed her head. "Yes, madame. Thank you." She darted a mystified look at Lyn, who touched her lips warningly. Mary bobbed again and retreated into the elevator.

"That family runs to flesh," observed Dame Isolde, accepting her teacup with a deftness born of practice. "Her grandmother, who's my age, was enormous at thirty, and Mary's mother weighs thirteen stone, which is just over

180 American pounds, I believe. It was excusable before people knew about carbohydrates and calories, but these days it's sheer gluttony and sloth! I must remind Mrs. Killigrew of my standing rule: any servant who cannot maintain a neat and pleasant appearance must leave my employ! Very nice tea, Miss Heath. Are you having some?"

"No, thank you." Lyn was a bit ruffled at the high-handed way in which Dame Isolde decreed such a personal matter as Mary's weight. "I do not intend to grow plump, Dame Isolde, but if I did, I would consider it my own affair."

"Ah! I've stung that rebel blood!" Dame Isolde chuckled, holding out her cup for more of the strong, pungent drink. "So long as you can waddle to the harp and get near enough to play, Miss Heath, I don't care if you break the scales! I pay you for your music. You are not a servant, as Amlyth very forcibly pointed out to me when I mentioned to him that it would be useful if you would take dictation from me now and then."

"I'd be glad to, if it can be conveniently arranged," said Lyn. "But I wouldn't want Miss Roxborough to feel I was invading her field."

"Kate is constantly lamenting the volume of work, and I'm not getting on at all well with my autobiography," said Dame Isolde. "She can scarcely complain if her duties are lightened. At any rate, leave her to me. I assure you, there will be no difficulty, and if we work well together, there will be a good bonus for the extra time."

The elevator opened. Dr. Hallenby came in, followed by Amlyth, who carried Corbie over to Dame Isolde and laid him on his cushions beside the couch. The little man huddled near his mistress's feet like a beaten dog who has found some comfort. He lay with his eyes shut and seemed in a stupor.

"Corbie!" Dame Isolde bent to him, shaking his shoulder. "What is it? Are you drunken, you little beast? Who else is here? I heard a man walking!"

The blind woman stared up, hands fingering air. "Amlyth? Miss Heath, what are they doing, what's going on?"

"I brought Corbie to you, mother," said Amlyth. "He's

not well, but it's nothing contagious, so he can sleep here, as he wishes to. You seem much better."

"That tiresome migraine! I can't remember a thing!"

Amlyth stared. Lyn gave him and Dr. Hallenby a shake of her head and said quickly, "Dame Isolde woke up right after Corbie had to leave. She couldn't remember anything about falling ill or coming to the solar. I've been playing for her, and she does seem over her headache."

"Let me just check," said Dr. Hallenby.

"You're here, Rex?" demanded Dame Isolde. "I must have been in difficulties to get you away from your surgery!"

"Well, whatever the cause, you're fine now. Amlyth, stay with your mother while I borrow Miss Heath."

Once in the elevator, the doctor burst out, "What happened?"

Lyn explained as they stepped out of the elevator on to the landing by Dame Isolde's principal rooms. "It's as if she's forgotten everything from the time she was told of her husband's death till she woke an hour ago."

"It's probably shock," said the doctor. "She can't accept the fact, so her mind has blanked it out."

"Will you tell her again?"

"That depends. It may be that once she's able to handle the knowledge, she'll remember it. Certainly for a few days I'd choose to leave her as she is." The doctor wiped his forehead. "We don't need any more crises. I may have to hospitalize Corbie, and Kate is ready to crack. No, Miss Heath, this is one time I'm for veiling the truth till it has to out."

"If Corbie is so broken up, should he be with Dame Isolde?"

Hallenby shrugged. "I can only guess that it's best for both of them. But someone else must be present always and get Corbie out if he starts causing problems. Till Kate's able to take a turn, I'll send Megan up from the mill cottage. She can use the extra shillings, and she is highly capable."

"Megan?" said Kate behind them in a strained, furious voice. "I won't have her in the house!"

# CHAPTER IX

Dr. Hallenby put his hand on Kate's arm. "Take it slow, my dear. You're supposed to be resting after a nice, long soak. I was just coming in to see you."

"And get that gossip-mongering Megan up here?" flashed Kate. "Over my dead body!"

"It may be, if you act bloody silly!" he said with deliberate brutality. "You're exhausted, Kate. Dame Isolde wears you out in the best times. If you try to cope now, you're asking for a complete breakdown, mental, nervous, and physical."

Her hand flew to her mouth as if he had struck her. To Lyn's acute embarrassment, cool, serene Kate began to weep.

"Kate," said Dr. Hallenby, kindly now, taking her hands firmly in his and making her look at him, "my wife is going up to London tomorrow, in spite of the tourists, for a go at Harrods and to take in a few plays and concerts. That's exactly what you need, and as your physician, I command you to go." He smiled coaxingly, with such real concern in his tone that Lyn wondered if he had more than professional, friendly interest in Kate. "As a friend, my dear, I implore you. Gillian will be delighted to have good company, especially since her bachelor cousin Timothy is in London and has besought her to find him a beautiful woman to squire around."

"But—Dame Isolde—"

"Kate, love, I can't warn you too strongly that if you don't take a few days now, you'll end up broken down for weeks, if not months. Amlyth will see to his mother, just

as he did when she went blind. In his funny way, he's a conscientious son. Miss Heath will weigh in and—"

"Megan will come up!"

"Yes, Kate, she will. And you shall go to London." He turned her toward her own door as one might a recalcitrant child. "Get your prettiest clothes and your toothbrush. I'm taking you home to Gillian."

She spun in protest.

"Hurry, Kate," he ordered.

Head high, she opened her door and went inside. Dr. Hallenby gave Lyn a rueful half-smile, spreading his hands. "I shouldn't blame you if you wanted to disappear at this stage, Miss Heath, but it would be an immeasurable kindness to this household if you would carry on for a week or two while Kate gets back to normal."

"I have no intention of leaving any time soon."

His tufted eyebrows shot up. "A beautiful musician made of stern fiber! Jolly good!" His voice dropped to a confidential pitch. "Don't let Kate put you off Megan. It all goes back long ago to when Amlyth was engaged to Kate but fell in love with Megan's daughter. Amlyth tried to spare Kate's pride, I believe, but she and his mother went right ahead with a party where the engagement would be announced, the last function in the banquet room. Amlyth left—simply went to earth—when neither woman would listen to his wish to cancel the affair." The doctor gave a dry laugh. "So there was an engagement party with no engagement. Champagne with nothing to toast."

"If he loved Megan's daughter enough to break with Kate, it's strange that—" Lyn floundered to a halt.

"That he deserted her?" Dr. Hallenby shrugged. "It's the fierce passions that often burn out quickly. Anyway, I don't know precisely what happened. Certainly for a time there were whispers that Amlyth might marry his cottage sweetheart. But he went away about the time it was obvious she would have a child, and I suppose you've heard how the poor girl ended." He shook his head regretfully. "She was a lovely girl—much of Megan in her, but she lacked Megan's strength. Very gentle, very sweet."

"Sweets to the sweet; farewell! I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid. . . ." Lyn recalled snatches of words said over that other drowned girl, Ophelia. She remembered that the priest, under royal pressure, had let Ophelia lie in holy ground, unlike Megan's daughter, who now lay beneath the wych elm outside the mossy, gray walls of the churchyard.

"Megan seems to bear Amlyth no grudge," Lyn marveled.

"Megan keeps her counsel. Her life is young David. You'll find him a difficult pupil, but if you reach him, I shouldn't be surprised if you don't one day speak with pride at having taught him. My wife loves music and feels he has the extra brilliance that with luck and work forges into genius."

"I think I can teach him something."

Dr. Hallenby laughed. "I'm sure you can teach him a great deal—if he's ready to learn. Don't be discouraged if it's slow." He glanced at his watch. "I shall deposit Kate with my wife and then call on Megan. She should be here in a few hours. My feeling is that Amlyth should have a little time on his own to pull himself together. If you would stay above till Megan comes, probably he'd be glad of the chance for a rest. Ring me, of course, if you have any anxieties. I'll call by in the morning."

"I'm sure we can manage," Lyn said. But she was glad Megan was coming, competent, matter-of-fact Megan who could bring a reassuring sanity to this great house of shadows, legends, and sudden death.

Amlyth seemed grateful in a numbed way when Lyn told him she would stay till Megan came. He got slowly to his feet, shoving the thick hair off his forehead His face was gaunt and set in grim lines as he looked at his slumbering mother and the forlorn little man crouched beside her.

"Thank you, Linnet. God knows I'm sorry you've had to go through as much as you have already. It's more than valiant to stay by us."

"It's nothing as hard for me as for you and those who

knew your father and Jock," said Lyn. "If I can help, I'm glad."

"At least mother and Corbie are resting now. But you will buzz if you have any problems?"

Lyn nodded emphatically and took his seat as Amlyth lifted a hand in salute, achieved a half-smile, and stepped into the elevator.

So he had loved David's mother, according to the doctor. Maybe they had quarreled. But whatever his excuse, he had deserted her. Did it gnaw him? Yesterday Lyn would have scoffed at the idea of Amlyth being tormented by conscience. Now she was not so sure. And he had been engaged to Kate once. In spite of his casually brutal manner with her, some interest must linger.

Lyn's eyelids drooped. The room was death-still except for Corbie's troubled breathing and an occasional murmur or rustling from Dame Isolde. Now that dusk was falling outside, it was completely dark in the room except for a faint, golden nimbus around a tiny light near the elevator.

Megan should be here soon. Hunger cramps reminded Lyn that she had not eaten in six hours, and then only a hasty sandwich. What a buzz there must be in the kitchen, provided Sally and Mrs. Killigrew hadn't gone off to scarify the village with all that had happened that day at Belleforest.

Poor Corbie, to see his twin like that! Mr. Drude's fall was sad, but he had been old and sunk in a mist of wine and whisky. Lyn could imagine the clacking of tongues and shaking of heads.

"That Amlyth Drude brings no luck to anyone," Mrs. Killigrew might say. "Putting up a rail to protect his father, and then the old master falls after walking safe all these years! And do you mind how Megan's daughter—"

Lyn straightened in defensive anger. It wasn't fair to have your past thrown at you forever! And then she remembered that this was exactly what she was doing—cutting off any soft thoughts for Amlyth by summoning anger for that old betrayal. She could sympathize with him, couldn't she, without forgetting that to love him was not fortunate?

Her eyes weighed shut and this time she could not hold them open.

Something—a sound, a sensation of furtive presence, startled Lyn from her cat-nap. Her eyes focused immediately on a dark form blocking out the elevator light.

"Corbie?" she whispered, and then made out the bulk of the dwarf's body by the couch. "Amlyth?"

There was no answer. Frightened, Lyn got to her feet, and realized in near panic that the shadowy intruder was between her and the buzzer. If she screamed, would anyone hear?"

"Who's there?" she called, keeping her voice low.

In spite of herself, she thought of ghosts, of Jock or Amlyth's father coming to see those to whom they had been closest. But ghosts don't block out very physical electric bulbs, do they?

Before Lyn could think what to do, there was the sound of the elevator opening. A crouched figure slipped inside. The door closed. Lyn ran over to push on the buzzer with a long, continuous pressure that could not be mistaken for a tea signal.

Who could it have been? What could they have wanted? Lyn fought her rising fear. It might well have been Sally or the cook or one of the gardeners prying out of morbid curiosity, or checking out of simple concern and retreating when they saw their mistress was not untended.

Lyn had not been able to tell whether the person was man or woman, but as he or she had dodged into the elevator, whichever it was had not given the impression of being a large or tall individual.

Through the intrusion, neither Dame Isolde nor Corbie had stirred. When the elevator door opened, Lyn peered to be sure it had a proper occupant, sighed with relief to glimpse Sally, and stepped inside, closing the door so that they could talk without disturbing the sleepers.

Sally was clad in an amazing leopard-printed duster which gaped to reveal a bikini sleep set of the same slinky fabric. Her hair was tousled as if from sleep, and when Lyn glanced at her watch, she saw with surprise that it was nine o'clock.

"Hasn't Megan come yet?" she asked Sally. "Did you see anyone as you came up just now?"

"No, miss, I don't think so, miss." Sally was plainly confused. "I was just drowsing off when I heard the buzzer and ran up quick for fear something might have misfired —it's been such a day it makes a body fair shiver! No telling what might happen next, is there, miss?" And Sally hugged her leopard covering in a childlike mixture of fear and excitement.

"You're sure you saw no one as you came?"

"I'm sure, miss, indeed I am! I'd have screamed, you may rely on it, if I had, unless it was someone I knew Besides, the doors be locked tight, Mrs. Killigrew and I saw to that!"

"Then how will Megan get in?"

"Oh, she'll tap at my window, miss, happen Mr. Amlyth should pass her in the wood."

"Is that where he is?"

"He had some cold vittles, miss, and prowled restless a bit before he sang out that he would go through the woods to walk with Megan."

"How long ago was that?"

"Lor', it was still bright daylight. Seven o'clock, likely."

Lyn frowned. "It can't be more than half an hour from the mill cottage."

"About that, good, brisk walking."

By now, Lyn felt uneasy about Megan. "I suppose she might have come by the road."

"Yes, miss, but it's nicer through the woods. Anyway, she likes to leave flowers for her poor daughter as often as she can."

It would be a mistake to tell Sally about the shadowy figure which had blotted out the light and escaped, but Lyn felt dread growing in her, a cold, tight swelling in her chest.

"Go see if Mr. Amlyth's in. If he is, please say I must talk to him at once."

"Yes, miss." Sally gestured toward the room where Dame Isolde and Corbie lay. "The mistress? And the poor mite man?"

"Sleeping."

"Oh, aye, that's the best thing now for them both." Sally bobbed her disordered hair. "I'll hurry straight to Mr. Amlyth, miss. Do you want to know if he isn't home?"

"Yes, at once—and if he can't come immediately, please come back and tell me so."

"Shall I bring up your dinner, miss? It's in the warming oven. We thought Megan would have been here long since, and here you still haven't had a bite!"

"I must see Mr. Amlyth first." Lyn had been hungry, but was now too worried to eat. She stepped out of the elevator. "Hurry, Sally!"

"I'm gone, miss!"

The elevator door closed. Lyn moved through the harps and leaned against the wall, too anxious to sit down.

It didn't sound.like what she knew of Megan to be so late. Of course, it was possible Dr. Hallenby hadn't found her at home. If Amlyth couldn't locate her, either, surely he would have sent a message or relieved Lyn himself. The whole thing was strange; too strange after the day's terrible events. And that shape by the elevator light that had vanished so quickly! Lyn pressed her hands to her eyes.

She hadn't imagined it. Someone—something—had been there, and might still be in the house. Lyn didn't, now, think it had been Sally, whose sleepiness had looked too genuine to be feigned.

Where was Amlyth? Why didn't he come? In spite of what she knew about him, Lyn felt protected with him, as if he would place himself between her and the dark, hidden forces at work in Belleforest.

If Megan would only appear!

Lyn was trembling Scolding herself silently, she moved to the Viking harp and traced the carving with her fingers, the coils of the dragon, the strong, proud woman with her eager, uplifted head.

This was how Dame Isolde now "saw" it, and though the eyes were not blessed with beauty, it was amazing how much even Lyn's untrained fingers told her, how much

they appreciated the textures and lines, absorbed the coolness of the ivory, and cherished, centuries' beloved wood.

This harp would still be beautiful, still sing, long after the fears of this night were forgotten along with the people who trembled, loved, hated, and hoped. Lyn wished that she could play it, and bring brilliant, shining notes into the dark solar.

She whirled at the faint sound of the elevator stopping. She didn't know how much she had hoped for Amlyth till Sally stepped out.

"Mr. Amlyth asks, miss, if you'll kindly come down to the library." Sally on tiptoe was a comical sight, for she wobbled frantically in her effort to walk quietly, threatening all kinds of smashing disaster if she lost balance.

"Megan?"

Sally shook her head. "No sign, miss. Now eat your dinner, do, while you're below. I'll stay till someone comes."

Someone?

Megan's failure to appear, coupled with Kate's absence, left Lyn and Amlyth with the major responsibility of seeing to his mother and Corbie. Dr. Hallenby would have to help them find someone else. Perhaps he already had. That might be what Amlyth wanted to explain. And at least he was safely back!

Heart lightened, Lyn stepped out of the elevator into the main hall. The glow from the high sconces splashed deep patterns on the fur rugs, so that the hall truly looked the stronghold of some savage warrior lord. Lyn hurried down the corridor and turned into the library.

Amlyth stood with his back to her, facing David, who stared back with defiant eyes, though fear showed in the taut-strung stance of his slim body.

"I won't wait here!" David was crying, hands clenched. "Gran will worry when she gets home if I'm not there."

"We left her a note," reasoned Amlyth.

"I'm going home anyway. She could have turned her ankle or taken a fall and might just manage to drag to the garden and call out. Someone has to be there."

"Your grandmother, we know, was on her way here," Amlyth argued with more patience than Lyn would have

credited him with. "She's as likely to make her way here as to the cottage."

David scowled, young jaw outthrust, and started to dodge past Amlyth. Amlyth barred his way, moving so quickly that he almost bumped Lyn. Then he saw her for the first time.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Heath! Maybe you can persuade David that he ought to stay with us till his grandmother finds us."

"Then you didn't see her?"

Amlyth's shoulders moved in a heavy shrug. "David says Dr. Hallenby stopped by before dinner and Megan agreed to help us while Kate's gone. She left in plenty of time to get here before dark. I should have met her in the woods, but I didn't, and when she wasn't at the mill cottage, I brought David back with me, thinking that I had somehow missed her and she'd be with mother."

"I'm going to look for her!" David cried.

Amlyth checked him. A look of pain shot over the man's face as the boy flinched from beneath his hand.

"I'm going to call the constable, David, and get up a search party from the village. But you must not wander off on your own. We have too many problems now."

"I'm no problem of yours!" the boy flashed.

"You are." Amlyth's tone was so heavy Lyn stared. "Understand this, David. You will do what I decide is best."

David's lips pulled back from his teeth. "How will you make me? You think because you're the master now of Belleforest that you can order the likes of me around!"

"No, David. But I am your legal guardian."

David's eyes blazed. "What?"

"Your grandmother asked me long ago to see that you were looked after should she die while you were young. I agreed, and we had the legal documents made up. In the absence of your grandmother, David, I am your guardian —and I intend to keep my promise to her."

David backed away, hands groping for a support they didn't find. "Then you—" His words broke and his gaze was fixed on Amlyth, a gaze of hatred, disbelief, and

hunger. "You must be my father! You're the one who killed my mother!"

"No. I'm not your father, David. I wish I were."

"Then why – You must be lying! You are the man she loved! Otherwise why should you agree to look after a cottage brat?"

Amlyth was still so long that even David looked anxious. "I loved your mother," he said at last. "What's strange about my wishing to help her child? Anyway, like it or not, believe me or not, you will do what I say. Sit down while I ring the constable."

On his way to the phone, Amlyth glanced at Lyn. "Why don't you bring your dinner in here? Sally tells me you haven't eaten."

David, glowering and puzzled, had subsided on the window seat, cradling his forehead against the pane to keep a vigil. Lyn went along to the kitchen, got a plate of still warm and fragrant shepherd's pie from the oven, and carried it and a glass of milk into the Library. Amlyth was just putting down the phone.

"They'll get a search under way immediately," he said. "David, you may go with the constable if you wish. He's told all the men to watch for that purple shawl you said your grandmother was wearing. I'd like to come, but someone must stay with my mother, and Miss Heath's been there for hours."

"You join the search," Lyn urged. "I'll take a blanket up and sleep in the solar."

"Are you sure you're fit for it?" he demanded, dark brows pulling together.

It was only then that she recalled the dark intruder. Fear chilled her but she fought it back. Whatever it was hadn't tried to hurt her; indeed, when challenged, it had faded very rapidly. If she told Amlyth now, he wouldn't help look for Megan, and that search was more important than chasing shadows.

"I'll be fine," Lyn assured him, managing some kind of smile. "But will you ask the constable to come see me as soon as he can after the search?"

"The constable?" Amlyth did frown now. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing much. I just wanted to ask him about something."

"The subjects one discusses with police are fairly limited in number," said Amlyth drily. He shrugged. "All right, I'll tell him."

Lyn crossed to David and took his hands firmly in hers. "I hope you find your grandmother quickly, David."

He nodded jerkily, his face averted. "I tried to get her not to come," he burst out. "Why should she put herself out for Belleforest folk? All they ever brought her and my mother was grief. But she would come." He sprang up. "I'm going to look for her," he shouted at Amlyth.

"Not by yourself," said Amlyth grimly. "I'll hunt with you, or you can join with some of the village men or the constable, but we have enough trouble without you getting lost."

"I know the woods better than anybody."

"Then you know there are treacherous places where it's not good to step at night. Come along. Let's get some strong torches."

"Torches?" echoed Lyn. "Wouldn't flashlights be better?"

"Is that what you Americans call torches?" grinned Amlyth.

Lyn hurried to her room for bedding and her night things. Back in the main hall, she met Amlyth and David, each with a large flashlight. Amlyth halted by the elevator as Lyn stepped into it.

"Have Sally stay in the solar with you," he commanded. "I don't like your being there without help if I'm not in calling range."

Thinking of the mysterious visitor, Lyn nodded agreement. "Good luck," she said to the man and the thin, dark boy beside him.

Same cheekbones, same long mouth, same hair. They have to be father and son, she thought, as the elevator hummed upwards. One had only to look at them, even if Amlyth hadn't revealed the tell-tale fact of his guardian-

ship. Why didn't he acknowledge David and make the amends he could, tardy as they were?

The elevator stopped. Filled with disquiet, Lyn took a long breath and entered the solar.

## CHAPTER X

Except for Sally, who had drowsed off on a sofa, the shrouded room looked just as it had. Dame Isolde and Corbie seemed not to have moved. Lyn decided not to rouse Sally, spread her blanket on a couch, plumped her pillow, and stretched out. She was so tired—

She hadn't meant to sleep till the searchers returned, had intended only to relax and ease her body, though there was nothing she could do about the thoughts chasing each other through her mind A time or two she heard a creak and peered, heart pounding, about the room. Twice, at least, she saw a flash of Jock in his blood, head nearly severed, and had to check an involuntary scream. But sleep she finally did.

When she woke, the room was bathed in a soft glow from the screened skylight and Dr. Hallenby was kneeling by her. He laid his finger to his mouth with a cautioning gesture toward Dame Isolde and Corbie.

"Come downstairs, Miss Heath," he whispered. "Sally can stay here " Sally was rubbing her eyes, yawning, and looking around with the astonishment of one who, during a nap, has been swished across the world by some genie.

"Stay with your mistress, my girl," commanded the doctor. "I've told Mrs Killigrew that she'll have to carry on without you for the morning."

"I'm hungry," whimpered Sally.

"You'll get breakfast, but not for an hour."

With that, the doctor gave Lyn a professional hand with getting into her robe and shepherded her to the elevator.

"Have they found Megan?" Lyn asked as the happenings of last night flooded back.

Dr. Hallenby had no hint of a twinkle today. "No. She's vanished completely."

"They've searched all the forest?"

"The likely part was covered last night. Now, of course, it's turned into a general search with notices out all around." The doctor rubbed one ear. "The strange thing is that Megan knew the path by heart. There was no chance of her straying. And there's no track for cars that might have run her down." His voice sank. "Had it been anything like a sprained ankle, she'd have been found right off. I'm afraid someone killed her and hid the body or else is holding her prisoner somewhere."

"But—why would anyone do that?"

The doctor stood back to let Lyn precede him into the hall. "I took the freedom of asking Mrs. Killigrew to have breakfast out for us," he said. "Let's talk over sustenance, my dear. If the human mechanism has proper food and rest, it's astonishing what it can bear up under. But after a few days without food, the supposedly incorruptible spirit withers like a jellyfish in an oven. Never underestimate the power of a good meal."

He had hustled her into the dining room and seated her. Now he began to fill her plate at the sideboard. "Bacon, ham, kippers, eggs?"

"Just toast, please."

"Nonsense!" exploded the doctor. He doffed covers, wielded forks, and in a few minutes set before Lyn a heaped assortment of fluffy, golden eggs, ham, and crisp toast. Another moment, and he was sitting across from her with a similar plate.

"Now," he said briskly. "Megan knew a great deal about everybody in the region, more than even I, which is saying a lot. It's possible that someone felt uneasy about what she could tell."

"Who?" demanded Lyn.

Dr. Hallenby trimmed fat off his ham with great preci-

sion. "That's what the police are trying to learn. I suppose you should know, Miss Heath, that Constable Leyland and another chap are having a long talk with Amlyth"

"Amlyth?" Slow, sick dread crept through Lyn. She shoved away her plate. "They think he—"

"Police don't think," said the doctor. "They sniff and smell like bloodhounds."

"But he and Megan are friends."

The doctor shrugged. "My dear, I'm not for a second accusing Amlyth. But his father's and Jock's deaths, though apparently accidental, happened shortly after his arrival home, and now for Megan to disappear—" He spread his hands. "Amlyth admits that he went to meet Megan shortly after seven. If she reached the woods, he should have met her. Yet he claims he did not."

"It's all circumstantial."

"At this stage, yes."

"He—he's not under arrest?"

"No, not unless it's happened in the last half-hour. Eat your breakfast, my dear. The next few days may be hard rowing." He scanned her with alert dark eyes. "I must say that I wouldn't blame you if you left at once. After all, you scarcely know these people."

Scarcely know?

Lyn started to protest. Then she realized with amazement that she had only been at Belleforest for three days. But already she was involved more deeply than she had ever been with people, much more deeply than with Morgan.

"I'll stay," she said.

The doctor watched her somberly. "That's brave of you, Miss Heath. I hope you won't regret it. What's this about you wanting to see the constable?"

Lyn told him.

"With respect, Miss Heath," said the doctor, "I think you must face the likelihood that you imagined it, had a flash of a dream."

"I did not imagine it!"

"My dear, you have been under a more severe nervous strain than you fully accept. I do assure you that such pro-

jections from dream to a waking reality do happen, very frequently."

"I was awake," Lyn insisted. "I think the constable should check the elevator for fingerprints!"

"Ghosts have no fingerprints." The doctor smiled. He shrugged, rising. "Well, I must go see my patients above. I vow that I'll send over a reliable practical nurse, since Megan can't help. Meanwhile, it's game of you to carry on. And I hear from Gillian that Cousin Timothy is quite besotted with Kate, thank goodness. I'll send the constable to you on my way up."

He bowed and moved away, a small, immaculately groomed man with something fey about him. He seemed very capable, though Lyn resented his dismissal of her glimpse of the intruder. She was not an hysterical woman.

She finished her food, hungry now that she had begun, and was having a second cup of coffee when Constable Leyland paused in the archway.

"May I see you now, miss?"

"Yes, please." There was something eager and likeable about the young man. In spite of everything, Lyn smiled at him. "Would you have coffee?"

He sat down with evident pleasure. "Jolly nice of you, miss!"

Lyn poured out and told him what she had seen, fighting against asking him about Amlyth. She had thought he might echo the doctor's attitude, but Constable Leyland looked thoughtful.

"No one was hurt. Nothing seems to have been stolen from the room. Most likely, miss, it's as you guessed—someone curious having a peep. But we'll take fingerprints anyway and see if there are any that don't match up folk who have a right to go up there." He looked apologetic. "We'd like to take your prints, miss, and we'll have to ask permission of everybody in the household to take theirs."

"Of course." Lyn hesitated on the edge of her question, and then blurted it out. "The person I saw, Constable Leyland—it's possible it was someone close to the family, someone whose prints won't stand out."

The young policeman gave her a sharp look. "You suspect anybody, miss?"

"No. It was just a fairly obvious thought."

Leyland grinned. "You'd be surprised at how people, including policemen, overlook simple things. Often the facts that jump up and hit a chap in the eye keep him from looking past them."

Was he speaking of Amlyth's unlucky prominence when ill-fated things took place? Lyn burned to ask, but in spite of the Constable's sunny eyes and apparent pleasure in her company, she had seen how the professional in him, when summoned, dictated his behavior. She switched her anxiety to a more natural source.

"Could Megan have stopped to see some friend or relative?"

"She had no living kin except David. Every house in the village and neighborhood has been checked. Besides, it's not like Megan to dawdle on the way to people who need her."

"Are there quicksands or any hazards like that in the woods?"

"There's a boggy stretch, but it's far enough from the path to be ruled out." He picked up his hat and bowed. "We'll get about those prints, miss, and I'll tell you the results as soon as we have them. Meanwhile"—he gave her the attractive, diffident grin that made him seem like a boy—"keep your eyes open for the obvious that others may not see."

An oblique warning?

Lyn crumpled her napkin, rang the bell to signal that she was through, and moved down the corridor. She hoped, yet feared, to see Amlyth. By the time she was in the central hall, her concern was greater than her shrinking. If he were mixed up in Megan's disappearance, the sooner she knew it, the better. Somehow Lyn could not believe that he would hurt anyone deliberately, though he had once done David's mother grievous harm indeed.

Where was David? How was he taking this?

Lyn looked in the library. It was empty. So was the family sitting room. Out in the corridor between her room

and Amlyth's she stood torn between reluctance to intrude and an urgent need to know how he was. Then she heard David's high, intense voice and Amlyth's deep, answering tones.

She took a long breath and knocked. It was reasonable for her to inquire after David. The door opened so abruptly that she stepped back.

"Ah, Linnet!" Amlyth looked weary, but his smile had some of its old mockery. "I take it that you've seen the Constable? He stopped to ask for permission to take my fingerprints and ask our people for theirs."

If Amlyth's permission had to be asked, he could not be under any serious suspicion. Lyn's heart lightened absurdly, though it plummeted when she looked at David.

His thin face was strained and scratched as if he had pushed through brambles last night, and his eyes were hollowed by exhaustion.

"I don't want to go to sleep," he insisted, continuing the argument Lyn had interrupted. "I want to find Gran!"

"So do we all," said Amlyth. By the look of him, he had not slept, either. "Reports are out and searchers are covering everything within miles and going back over where we looked last night. But David, you have to face the fact that your grandmother may not be found for weeks. She may be wandering in amnesia, or have been hurt somehow or—"

"She may be dead!"

Amlyth hunched his shoulders. "That's possible, but since no signs of violence and no body have been found, I won't believe that. Meanwhile it won't do for you to go ill. You may be needed very much at any moment, and you owe it to Megan to keep yourself fit so you'll be ready."

"It's easy for you to talk!" David worked his hands, and tears stood in his eyes. "She was nothing to you but someone to nurse that wicked old woman upstairs!"

Amlyth thrust his hands in his pockets, sitting on the edge of the green trunk he had told Mrs. Killigrew to leave alone. "If you expect me to swell with filial rage at your opinion of my mother, you'll be disappointed. I can't blame you for bearing rancor at Belleforest. But it is not

very useful, David. You will be staying with us for a time."

"And you'll make me do what you say!" thrust the boy.

"I have better ways to use my energy." Amlyth shrugged, rising. "Go burrow through the thickets if you must, or have some stupid accident because you're dead on your feet. It will certainly help your grandmother."

David glared for several minutes. Then his head went down on his arm and his shoulders heaved. "I—I can't just go on as if she were all right! What *can* I do?"

"Take the sleeping pills Dr. Hallenby left, get a warm shower, and climb between your sheets." Amlyth dropped a hand on the boy's back. "After that, I'll wager things will take care of themselves."

"But I'll wake up sometime!"

"When you do, I'll go with you to have another look."

David got up, wiping his face with his sleeve but risking a side glance at them. "Is it all right if I get some milk from the kitchen?"

"Get all you want. I've told Mrs. Killigrew and cook you're to be treated as one of the family. She might even have some fresh scones and Devon cream."

David went off with a ducked half-nod that could have been taken for thanks. Lyn became acutely aware that she was in a gentleman's bedroom and retreated for the door.

"Let's step out and let the birches chaperone us," laughed Amlyth, reading her discomfort. They went past her room and outside.

Sun splashed through the long, narrow leaves and whitened the pale trunks. Dew still sparkled in the thick grass and in the petals of the buttercups, violets, and daisies. It seemed impossible that two men had died yesterday a short distance away and that a woman had vanished, perhaps even in this glade.

"So you saw somebody by the elevator last evening," Amlyth mused. He was behind Lyn. When his hands closed on her arms, shock went through her in a tingling wave that was both frightening and pleasant. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She tried to speak, and had to swallow before she could

form words. "I—I didn't want to keep you from looking for Megan."

"You softie!" He gave her a little shake and tightened his grip even more. "That's a nice English term for foolish. Going up there, believing something was bobbing in and out! Don't you do such a thing again. Come straight to me, hear?"

If his hands were not so strong she wouldn't, surely, feel so weak. "Sally was with me," she said, trying to sound crisp. She set her arms against his to push them away.

To her surprise and amazingly acute disappointment, he let her go. "Sally! She could stand by screaming while someone cut your throat and proceeded to her, but that's about all." His eyes held Lyn's, and now there was no amusement in their hazel depths. "Linnet, tell me true. You didn't think your shadowy guest was me?"

"No. It was too small."

"Saved by objective observation, not by faith," he teased, but there was hurt in his voice.

Lyn turned her face against a tree, overwhelmed by tiredness. "I don't know what to think," she said, keeping her words tightly controlled. "So I'm trying to do what I can to help and just not wonder about mysteries."

"Bless you, Linnet. Am I a mystery?"

"Yes."

He moved around before her. "Fair damsel, I am yours to question."

"I'm not a policeman."

"And I wasn't anything so cooperative with them." He cocked his head at her in his old rakish way. "Have a go, Linnet."

Are you David's father? Why did you treat his mother so? Have you anything to do with these disasters at Belleforest since you returned? If he were a man to beware of, he wouldn't tell her the truth, and his loves of the past were none of her business.

"It will be a jolt to you," she said, moving away, "but there's nothing I want to ask."

"How you lie."

Lyn spun on him. "What?"

"You want to ask many things, but either they're not proper or you're afraid of the answers."

"Why should I be afraid?"

His mouth quirked. "Why indeed?" He blocked her way. "Aren't you going to respond to my offer and allow me a few queries?"

"About what?"

"You."

"Why, whatever—"

He didn't touch her, but his gaze was more effective than force in keeping her where she was. "Is there a man back in America? Are you as cool and sensible as you act? How long will it be before you tire of our strange social island at Belleforest and look for livelier surroundings? I wonder many things. But most of all—if you would grant me one question—I wonder if you love someone."

Lyn, staring at him, wondered, too.

"You're not sure," he said. "That's interesting." He stepped aside to let her pass. "Thank you, Linnet, for walking with me. The constable is leaving a man in the house so you can feel safe, and Dr. Hallenby will get a nurse up to spell us with mother."

"You—you'll be here?"

He laughed. "Did you think they would hale me off to gaol? My best friend would have to admit I was ripe for questioning after two fatal accidents and a disappearance from a place where I happened to be at the strategic time. I'm suspect by sheer weight of events, but that's all."

It seemed more than enough to Lyn. "You're going to search with David, then, after you've both slept?"

He nodded.

"But you don't really expect to find Megan?"

"No. Still, by daylight we may pick up some clue. Besides, David needs to feel he's doing something to help her."

Lyn shivered. "I hope he doesn't have to stay in this suspense long. It's better to know the truth, even if it's terrible, than wait and hope and never be sure."

"Yet most of us spend a good part of our lives waiting, hoping, and never being sure."

"I couldn't bear it."

"Then you had better never fall in love."

Sudden tears stung Lyn's eyes. Amlyth baffled her completely. She did not intend to wait and hope and never be sure for his sake!

"Goodbye," she said, and hurried through the birches to the house.

Constable Leyland and a fingerprinting expert summoned from the nearest bureau were in the library, just finishing Mrs. Killigrew, while Mary, Thomas, the gardeners, and cook waited their turn. They all seemed fascinated with the excitement and eager to be printed, except for Mrs. Killigrew, who scrubbed ferociously at her stained fingers as she hove away from the table.

"If it weren't for looking suspicious, I'd never agree to such mucking about. I'll have to wear gloves for a week."

"Sorry, madame, but we haven't found a cleaner way to do it," said the Constable. "Miss Heath, would you like yours done now so you can tidy up and forget about it?"

"That's a good idea," said Lyn.

It proved a far different process from what Lyn had imagined. The baldheaded, plump expert had a large ink pad placed next to a labeled sheet of paper. He took each of Lyn's fingers and placed them one by one on the inked pad, and then on the paper under the proper label. He placed each finger almost sideways to begin, and then carefully, precisely rolled the finger to the other side. He did all the fingers and thumbs of both hands in this way.

"You see, miss," he explained, "when we have the whole finger this way, even a tiny bit of print may provide positive identification."

"Dr. Hallenby says we had better try to get Dame Isolde's and her little man's off their drinking glasses," said Constable Leyland. "We'll do it that way if we can, because of their conditions."

"I'll send Sally down to you," Lyn offered.

As the elevator opened on the solar, she heard Dame Isolde. Relief went through her, despite the old woman's shrewish tones, for there had been something uncanny

about that long slumber. Would her memory still be blacked out concerning her husband's death?

"Why are you here, girl?" She was fussing at Sally. "You can't even brew reasonable tea! If Kate is too ill to perform her duties, then send me that American harp girl!"

Sally's full lower lip trembled. Dr. Hallenby interposed briskly, "You're naughty, Isolde. Stop it at once. Sally would be far happier in the kitchen than coping with you. She deserves praise and sympathy, not the edge of your tongue. Kate, as I have told you, will be indisposed several days at least."

"Where's Miss Heath, then?"

"She's just coming in," said the doctor, rising. "Good morning again, my dear. I suppose Sally is wanted below?"

"Yes," said Lyn. "Thanks for letting me get breakfast, Sally." Sally escaped. Lyn turned to Dame Isolde, who was sitting bolt upright. "Good morning, Dame Isolde. I'm glad you're feeling better."

"Better? Better than what?" The old woman fixed the doctor with her sightless glare. "Why are you all acting like a pack of ninnies, Rex? Since when have I needed someone with me all the time except for Corbie?"

The little man sat by her feet, but though his eyes were open he did not seem to focus on anything. At mention of his name, he huddled closer to his mistress's knees. She patted his head, and some of the tension in that small, hunched body seemed to ease.

"You had a very bad migraine, Isolde," said the doctor. "And what with Kate laid low, I thought it advisable to have someone with you."

"My son seems not to concern himself with my problems!"

"He has been with you and will be again," soothed the doctor. "As I have told you, dear lady, you have been in one of the deepest sleeps you have ever had."

"I wouldn't trust you to gauge the depth of my sleep," sniffed Dame Isolde. "Never mind, I suppose I must tolerate your judgments as long as they're not too outrageous!

But keep that Sally out of here. I prefer Miss Heath's company." She smiled with great charm. "You will play for me, won't you, my dear, and that will pass the time for both of us?"

"Of course I'll play," Lyn promised.

In gay inspiration, Dame Isolde clapped her hands. "I know what would entertain me! You can begin lessons with young David! What would be a better room for them?"

"His harp isn't here yet," objected Lyn, taken aback.

"Nonsense, you can explain the history of harps and ground him a bit in theory. It will give me the most excellent of chances to hear the young man, learn something about him!"

"You know that he didn't want to take lessons at Belleforest. That's why we ordered the troubadour harp."

"A child's foolish notion! Am I to have no idea of my protégé's caliber?" Bright spots crimsoned Dame Isolde's cheeks. "I will have him up here! I must! Use what excuse you wish, but he shall come for at least a few times!"

"Isolde—"

She wrested her hands from the doctor. "I will hear his voice!" she cried. "I will have his presence in the room with me till I can feel and know it! If he has no seed of greatness, I will not trouble with him. I have done too much of that already with my husband and my stubborn, cruel son!"

The doctor raised his eyebrows at Lyn and shrugged. "I'd try to persuade him, Miss Heath. Corbie is physically all right, but he may be some time before he comes out of that haze. I'll call by tonight." He added under his breath, "And I'll send a reliable nurse!"

"Don't whisper!" rapped Dame Isolde. "You know I can't abide that!"

For one moment the guise of benevolent physician dropped from the doctor. He gazed at his patient with cold hatred before he smiled and said lightly, "Ah, Isolde, you can abide whatever you have to, as we both well know Don't let her bully you, Miss Heath." He pressed Lyn's hand confidentially and stepped into the elevator.

"The fool!" murmured Dame Isolde to herself. "The brutal, cunning fool!"

Lyn sat down at the harp and began to play.

## CHAPTER XI

Lyn played till her fingers stung and ached, while the bald fingerprint man came to dust the elevator entrance with powder and photograph the results with quiet efficiency. She played till Corbie dropped asleep and even till, at last, Dame Isolde drowsed off, half-recumbent on her sumptuous cushions.

How eerie that she could not remember her husband's death. Yet some knowledge of it might be imbedded below the level of consciousness. Perhaps it was for this reason that she had insisted so vehemently that David come to her.

Would he?

Remembering his set, defiant face, Lyn doubted it, and sighed. For all Dame Isolde's domineering, there was a gallantry and style about her that made Lyn wish the old woman could be happier. Nothing would make Dame Isolde more content than to find someone in the family with the talent she revered, talent which had decayed in her husband and which had been rejected by Amlyth.

Dame Isolde was still asleep when Sally brought in the nurse, a tweed-skirted, middle-aged woman with mannishly clipped hair and a surprisingly gentle voice. Sally introduced her as Mrs. Frobisher.

"You may tell Dame Isolde that I'll be back in the afternoon," Lyn said. "Don't be troubled if she acts a bit hostile."

"Never mind, love, I know something of her and I've

had patients before who didn't want a nurse. We shall do jolly well."

"I hope so," said Lyn. She saw Dame Isolde stir, and fled.

It seemed near heaven to take a scented, bubbly bath and then stretch out between fresh sheets in her own bed, able to look out to the Silver Wood.

She thought of walking there that morning with Amlyth. A warm trembling stirred in her as she seemed again to feel his hands on her bare arms. He had not tried to kiss her and had not spoken directly of love, and yet it was easy to believe he cared for her.

With Amlyth, that was far from a guarantee of joy. Anyway, he was so harrassed and driven at the moment that anyone who helped would be viewed through the distorting lens of gratitude. Or—could it be that he was trying to switch her attention from him as a potential kidnapper or murderer by diverting her with the hope of a romance?

Lyn moved restlessly among the pillows that had seemed so luxurious only moments before. Her instinctive feelings about Amlyth protested that he could not and would not pretend love; but her feelings were certainly not to be trusted when a touch from him could throw her into such tumult.

On a logical, factual basis, Amlyth might be tricking her after doing away with Megan—and that might in turn tie in somehow with what had seemed his father's accidental death and Jock's suicide.

Her heart chilling, Lyn got up and locked her door Oh, if only Megan would turn up safe! Then this whole miserable business could be on its way to healing oblivion. She pulled the draperies to hide the haunting beauty of the woods, lay down again, and this time she slept.

When she woke, it was four o'clock. She would have to go up shortly to see Dame Isolde and relieve Mrs. Frobisher, if Amlyth had not. But first she needed to seek out David and try to persuade him to begin his lessons in the solar in the hearing of the autocratic old woman whom he

had called wicked and whom he seemed to blame for his grandmother's disappearance.

Mrs. Killigrew directed Lyn to David's room, which adjoined Amlyth's. The boy was not there. "I think, miss, that the pair of them be out hunting old Megan," said the housekeeper. "Rare lot of good it'll do them! She's sunk in the bogs, most likely."

"I hope you won't let such an idea get back to David," Lyn said. "I shall have a look for them. In case Dame Isolde wants me, please tell her I won't be long."

"Madame has had her lunch, told off Mrs. Frobisher and Mr. Amlyth very roundly, and she must still be napping, for she hasn't rung for tea."

"Good," said Lyn, and went along the corridor that opened on the woods.

She spoke to the gardeners, who were busy with soft fruit. Then she passed through the walled garden, and the clearing between it and the deeper woods.

Where should she look? The path between here and the mill would have been combed several times at least. Amlyth and David would go off to secret nooks and special hiding places.

There was not much chance of finding them, but Lyn needed the exercise and was enjoying the fresh, clean air, laden with sun, so different from the solar room with its shrouded skylight.

She took the first turning to the right and moved along the dappled path, with old leaves crunching underfoot and new leaves all around and above.

Wasn't Elaine's tower off in this direction, the place Ogier had built for his love, where she had died at the hands of his jealous wife? The lovers must have often walked on this ground under trees that had sprouted the generations of seedlings that thrived in the present forest.

The searching parties had moved on to more distant spots, for Lyn saw no one. She came to numerous forks at different times and in an effort to stay orientated, always took the right turning. The woods were deep here, not like the comparatively narrow band between Belleforest and the church. The path faded; Lyn stood in the cool, green

shadows, wondering whether to go a little further or turn back.

As she glanced about, her eyes caught a glimmer of gray, nearly hidden by trees and bushes. It was a building of some sort. Elaine's tower?

Lyn had a bright red scarf around her neck. She untied this and fastened it to a limb of one of the big oaks so that she could find her way back to the path. Then she set off for the stone walls, fighting through vines and brambles, for the way was overgrown.

What a strange little place! It was perhaps thirty feet high and about twenty feet in diameter, with buttresses jutting out to give it a star shape.

Narrow, paneless windows, most of them overgrown with pink briar roses and ivy, looked out from the ground floor and what must have been a second level. Moss reached up the buttresses and lower walls as if slowly, steadily, the forest were reclaiming this construction of man.

Enchanted, was all Lyn could think.

One could almost believe that Elaine slept inside, waiting for her love. Between the desire to go in and a feeling that it would be a kind of sacrilege, Lyn paused outside the only door. Hay was piled up inside. This was now evidently a storage building.

The leaves and soil around the threshold were disturbed! Could it be—

"Megan!" she called, stepping in. From the corner of her eye, she caught a flash of form and motion as something crashed down on her head.

Red lightning was trapped inside her skull, trying to split it open. Lyn groaned as she opened her eyes, winced at the pain of moving, and lay back.

Had a stone fallen on her?

"You're all right," Amlyth assured her. "Took a nasty crack, though. Did you see who did it?"

Lyn blinked as he helped her sit up, and gingerly felt the abraded lump swelling at the back of her head.

"Maybe you did!" she snapped, physically hurt, emo-

tionally exhausted. "Maybe you're behind all these things. You're never far away when they happen!"

"I saw your scarf on the tree. How could any woman resist peeking inside the tower? Besides, David gave me the slip and I thought he might have holed up here." Straightening, Amlyth shouted, "David! If you're upstairs, you might as well come down!"

No answer. Amlyth went to a rough but sturdy ladder that passed up to the second floor. "Lady Elaine had a rope ladder that she used to pass down to Ogier," explained Amlyth. "But one day she passed it down to his wife."

He gave the ladder a testing shake. "David, if you're there, you'd better come down!"

A sulky face peered down. "Why can't you leave me alone?" David asked.

"Because I'm responsible for you, you young devil! Now come out of there!"

Amlyth was really angry. David, scowling with equal blackness, came down with exasperating slowness, and stared in what seemed genuine surprise at Lyn, who had got up and dusted herself off.

"You, too?" he demanded.

"You wouldn't have hit her over the head?" Amlyth took the boy by the shoulders, obviously restraining the urge to shake him. "Someone did just now."

"It wasn't me." Glaring, David wrested loose.

"Do you know who it was?"

"No. I must have gone to sleep up there because the first thing I heard was you bellowing."

"And you've seen no one?"

David shook his head.

"Someone hit me," said Lyn, rubbing the still painful bruise. "They must have been hiding just inside the door."

"Do you think I'm lying?" challenged David.

Lyn looked into the flushed, angry face. "No," she said after a minute. "I believe you."

"It might have been a gypsy," pondered Amlyth, "or some trespasser who didn't want to be seen."

"It might have been someone who knows what happened to Gran," cried David.

"Well, let's have a good look around, beginning in the loft," Amlyth decided.

He led the way up, turning to help Lyn, whose head still throbbed. David came last. Parts of the flooring of heavy beams had rotted away, and it was even darker than the ground level, but it did not take much light to see that the place was empty except for bales of hay stacked against the walls.

Descending, they poked about the bales in the lower chamber, but except for some disturbed leaves and moss, there were no signs.

"If I had been five minutes earlier, I'd probably have seen whoever it was as they left," Amlyth said regretfully. "Well, it's one more thing for the constable to investigate. I suppose we'd best be getting home."

"I don't want to stay there," David growled. "I—"

To her own amazement, Lyn whirled on him. "Don't you know you're not the only person in the world? If you're really concerned about your grandmother, you'll stop worrying people so they can concentrate on the search for her."

While David stared, flabbergasted, she sailed on. "Also, we are going to begin your lessons at once if you intend to study with me."

"I—I can't learn anything now."

"Indeed you can. A few hours of music a day should give you something good to think about instead of seeing how much trouble you can cause."

"I don't want to take lessons at Belleforest."

"You're living there."

"But—"

"David. A musician must learn to perform in all kinds of places, before all sorts of people. Your first lessons on harp history will be in the solar."

His dark eyes blazed even in the tower's dim light. "Dame Isolde's up there."

"Yes, she is. So are the harps, wonderful harps, dozens

of them." Lyn's temper had subsided. Now she watched the boy, hoping she hadn't pushed too hard but sure that firm tactics would work better with him than placatory ones.

It was a gamble, but enough disasters had occurred to make Lynn feel that unless she could make some progress with David quickly, she would leave Belleforest.

She trusted Amlyth emotionally, but objective evidence was strong against him. While she felt for Dame Isolde, she knew well enough that the old woman would wring her dry and toss her to one side when her strength was gone. The Drudes were users, and, Lyn feared, discarders.

She could not bear to be discarded by Amlyth. She would rather leave before he laid siege in earnest. So now she looked into David's eyes, which were on a level with hers, and said flatly, "I don't want a reluctant pupil. If you want to study with me, you must do as I say. No arguments, no questions."

"If you're all that bloody good, why are you a teacher?"

"Because I like teaching—if the pupil's talented." Lyn smiled, less annoyed with him now that she had pinned his ears back. "I have performed a good deal in public, David, but I am not star quality. You may be."

They were back on the dim path now, Amlyth dangling Lyn's scarf as he followed her. David, in the lead, stopped abruptly.

"Right," he told Lyn. "I'll do just what you say, and we'll see if you can teach me anything."

They shook hands and plunged through the woods. Amlyth gave Lyn an applauding pat on the back. Full of relieved triumph, she felt as if she were floating. Even her head ached less.

It was dinnertime when they got to the house. Amlyth rang the police about the attack on Lyn. She wolfed down a steaming beef pasty and went up to the solar, first extracting David's promise to follow as soon as he had eaten.

From inside the elevator, before its door slid open, Lyn could hear muffled singing. As the panel eased back, she

listened in mute surprise. Mrs. Frobisher and Corbie were roaring together while Dame Isolde tapped her foot in rhythm.

A bonnie wee lassie whose name it was Nell
Lived in a house where her grandmother dwelled . . .

Thunderstruck, but pleasantly so, Lyn stood by the wall till the song ended. Corbie, thumping his knee with his fist, croaked into a new tune.

I dreamed a dreary dream this night
That fills my heart with sorrow;
I dreamed my love came headless home
Oh, from the braes of Yarrow!

Headless? Jock had been headless. Corbie's voice broke as if his own windpipe had been cut. He leaned his face against Dame Isolde's knees and shook with heavy sobbing.

"That's too sad a song, my little man," soothed Dame Isolde, stroking him. "There, there, we'll have another gay tune!"

Mrs. Frobisher launched into a ribald song about a man who came home to find a pair of strange boots by his bed. Corbie gulped and joined in, cackling wildly, but at least responding.

The familiar songs gave a freeing means of expression without making him shape thoughts and speech. How this unlikely songfest could have started intrigued Lyn, but she was glad it had.

"Laws!" puffed Mrs. Frobisher as they finished a lusty chorus. "I'm winded absolute! And hungry, too!" Rising, she smiled at Lyn. "I hope you weren't off-put by our country way of singing, Miss Heath!"

"I enjoyed it," Lyn said truthfully. "I'm sorry to relieve you so late, but I walked a little too far into the woods."

"You're here now, which is all that matters. Shall I come again in the morning?"

"That would probably work best."

"Good night, then, Dame Isolde, Corbie." The tweedy woman nodded.

Corbie had lapsed back into his daze, but Dame Isolde spoke in an unusually benevolent tone. "A very good night to you, Mrs. Frobisher!" As the nurse left, Dame Isolde stretched out her hand commandingly to Lyn.

"The boy? He is coming?"

"Very shortly."

"Good." With a sigh, the mistress of the house relaxed her grip and leaned back on her pillows. "I promise to keep quiet. He will think I am asleep."

Arrogant most of the time, often infuriating, bewilderingly tractable as she was now, or enjoying bawdy songs—who could understand Dame Isolde?

"David wants to learn," Lyn said. "And he has promised to accept me as his teacher. I think you may be very proud of him one day."

"He must be great!" Dame Isolde's eyelids drooped, and for a moment her face had the frightening rigidity of a death mask. "He must carry on the music of the Drudes!"

David's music will be his own—and everyone's, thought Lyn.

At that moment, David stepped out of the elevator with Amlyth. While David stood stiffly, Amlyth put a bag of Pontrefact wafers in Corbie's lap and sat down.

"I have a sudden thirst to learn more about harps." Amlyth grinned lazily. "Proceed, Linnet. I shall spend the night here. If you can relieve Mrs. Frobisher occasionally tomorrow, it won't be too hard on anyone."

It must have strained his mother's control to the breaking point not to come erect and tell him she could do very well without him, but though a muscle twitched in her jaw, Dame Isolde maintained her simulated drowse.

Stifling a laugh, Lyn switched on several of the small sconce lamps and turned to find David staring at the Viking harp.

Wonderingly, with infinite delicacy, he touched the carved face and stared at Lyn. "She—she looks like you!"

"Oh, no," protested Lyn. "She was made to resemble

the wife of the Viking chief who was first of the family to live in England, and she is supposed to resemble the Lady Elaine, Sir Ogier's love."

"Elaine and the Viking woman are dead. A harp can never die, and so this woman is you." Hand straying to the dragon, David spoke in a dreamlike but positive tone. "That must be why you came here. The harp called you."

"I came for you," Lyn began, but Amlyth interrupted.

"David, a number of beautiful women may look like the harp—after all, there's no hair or eye coloring to distract the eye. Did you know your mother, too, very much resembled Lady Elaine and this archaic Dane-Queen?"

"She did?" cried David eagerly. "Gran has a picture of mum, but her hair is all short and it's hard to tell much about her."

"Then you should know she had the grace and beauty you see there on the pedestal."

David caressed the harp as if it were alive. And so began the first lesson.

An hour later, they told Amlyth good night and rode down in the elevator. Lyn braved Mrs. Killigrew and cook's morning wrath by making glasses of chocolate milk and rummaging in the tins till she found a cannister of delicious wholemeal wafers.

Perched companionably on kitchen stools, she and David relished their bedtime snack. "It's funny," he groped, "I never thought of people at Bellcforest doing things like this—acting like anybody."

Lyn doubted if nightcaps like this were common to anyone but Sally, but nodded encouragingly. "Under all their differences, people are usually similar in what they enjoy."

"Even Dame Isolde didn't look cruel and fierce. Asleep like that she reminded me something of Gran."

"They're near the same age."

David shoved his glass away. "Miss Lyn, do you think Gran is all right?"

"I hope so, David." He hung his head. Lyn gave him as much comfort as she felt was wise, since there was no telling what horrible reality he might have to face.

"It does seem to me that if she'd been hurt or killed,

she'd have been found. But if she's lost her memory and is wandering about someplace, it may be a while before she's located. Meanwhile, she would want you to study and not take foolish risks. She loves you very much, you know."

Mutely, he nodded. Lyn rinsed the glasses and led the way down the corridor. Outside her door, she smiled at him. "I'm just across the hall if you need anything," she said.

His eyes lifted to hers and gave her as direct a glance as she'd ever had in her life. "You are a good teacher," he said. "I'm sorry you were hurt today." And with that, he stepped across the corridor hung with mirrors and with portraits of people who might have been his ancestors.

## CHAPTER XII

Mrs. Frobisher seemed a fortunate choice, for when Lyn went up shortly before noon to let her go down for lunch and a bit of rest, the stout, graying nurse was knitting and regaling Dame Isolde with a ten-year survey of local gossip, culminating in why this year's village fete had not raised as much as it had last year.

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Frobisher, "our young vicar offput most of the older folk by letting some long haired guitarist sing in church. So they be staying home from service and money-raising things like the fete till the vicar admits he was wrong."

"I'll have my secretary send him a check!" said Dame Isolde gleefully. "I'll make it enough to cover the fete deficit and hire enough long-hairs for a concert!"

"Dame Isolde, that will fair do for some of those oldstagers!" Mrs. Frobisher cried between horror and approval.

"At least it should keep them from sleeping through sermons. Miss Heath, are you there? Please make a note of that for Kate to attend to whenever she decides to come back to work."

"And will ye play the harp, lass?" asked Corbie in a rational but subdued way.

"I'll be glad to, if Dame Isolde would enjoy it."

"You pick your tunes well, child," said the old woman. "They never jar on my mood. Play by all means. You will bring David up for a lesson this afternoon?"

"Yes, if it won't fatigue you."

Dame Isolde's chin thrust upwards, and her smile was fierce, like an aged Valkyrie's. "When the boy is near, I feel young again — that is, I have hope! They seem to me now the one and the same, hope and youth. He will not tire me, Miss Heath!"

Lyn played through Dame Isolde's and Corbie's luncheon, which was brought by Sally on a trolley. By the time Mrs. Frobisher returned, Lyn was ravenous. She got to the dining room just in time to salvage some cold chicken, watercress and cucumber sandwiches, and a bowl of fruit salad.

"Shall I ask for soup or an omelet?" suggested Amlyth, who was sipping coffee while David vanquished an enormous helping of chocolate blancmange.

"This is fine." Lyn placated her urgent hunger before turning to David. "Is five o'clock today a good time for your lesson?"

"I suppose so."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic."

David stared at his plate. "We've had another hunt," Amlyth explained. He spread his hands. "There just is no trace."

"Gran's dead, or held prisoner, or she's lost her memory," said David. "I—I wish we knew for sure. What do people do when someone just vanishes?"

"What we've done," Amlyth said gently. "They look hard till everything's been covered. Then they keep out a watch but get back to living as normally as possible."

"I never had anyone but Gran," David cried. "It—it's

not normal for me to live in this big old famous house. I don't belong here."

"Yes, you do," said Amlyth. "You love music, and this is a house where music is worshipped, everything else subordinated to it." He laughed wryly. "Oh yes, young David, you belong to Belleforest far more than ever I did."

"I'd still rather live with Gran in the cottage."

Amlyth shrugged. "No one can escape his fate."

"You did," challenged David. "Gran told me you were rare marvelous with the violin, but then you stopped playing and left Belleforest and everything expected and planned. So you didn't become what it seemed you surely would."

"It was my fate to refuse to be what people wanted." Amlyth smiled ironically. "David, will you go into the library and bring back what's on the main table?"

The boy went out, eager in spite of himself. Amlyth made a pyramid of his hands and said thoughtfully, "Constable Leyland came by this morning with the results of the fingerprinting. No prints around the elevator or the frame upstairs belong to anyone unauthorized to go to the solar."

"So the constable thinks I was imagining things."

"It's at least an objective possibility." Lyn stared at him in anger. "There's another obvious thing," he said slowly. "If there was someone—and let me say that I accept your certainty that there was—then it was a person who could go there without raising suspicions. Which makes it puzzling that they'd sneak up. The only explanation is that they intended to do something they didn't want found out or traced to them."

"What?"

Amlyth raised an eyebrow. "Murder? There's not much in that room that can be stolen by one person or without making a fearful ruckus."

Coldness spread down Lyn's spine. "If someone in the household is set on killing, how can anyone be safe?"

"They can't. And the whole incident is too wispy to justify a police guard. But I have called a private detective

service in London and they're sending down two men who will alternate on guard until things clear up."

Shivering, Lyn said, "It's pretty awful to think a killer may be running around loose." She met Amlyth's hazel eyes, which were direct and concerned. "Maybe—maybe I did imagine it."

He shook his head, smiling. "No, Linnet. Don't try to make what your senses tell you fit a more comfortable or easy frame. It's lying—besides, it never works."

Piqued, she asked, "Did your senses tell you to be an anthropologist instead of a musician?"

He winced. "Can't I give you good advice out of my wide experience in doing the wrong things?"

"Don't you enjoy your work?"

"Very much. It has helped me know something of other people and therefore more of myself. But the hard truth is that I stopped music because mother was so inhumanly determined that I should be great. I wanted more to be a man."

"So you denied part of yourself."

"Isn't that necessary every time one makes a choice?"

"Choices are surely to make you closer to what you choose to be to make you more, not less!"

"Ideally, perhaps." His hand closed over hers. "Word of honor, Linnet. Don't you know women who veer away from truly becoming women—a limiting choice certainly—in order to preserve their independence and freedom?"

"I don't see what that has to do with your being a musician." Lyn removed her hand. Amlyth wrinkled his nose at her.

"Not being a musician was the only way to keep mother from dominating me, possessing driving! To play or not to play, that was my question. It was damned well a matter of spiritual life or death. I have never been sorry. I wouldn't be a professional musician now, though I may go back to playing for enjoyment."

There was a sound of footsteps in the corridor David rushed in, laden with a harp. It was a heavy, awkward burden, but he could carry it.

"The troubadour!" he called. "My harp! It's come." He brought it over to Lyn and set it down before her. "Isn't it a beauty? It must be about the size Glasgerion used."

"Glasgerion?"

"He was the great Welsh harpist. You don't know about him?"

"I'm afraid not," said Lyn apologetically.

David swept his fingers across the strings, delighting in the ripple as he sang teasingly:

"He harped a fish out of salt water,
Or water out of a stone,
Or milk out of a maiden's breast
That babe had never none!"

"I see you can give me some lessons," Lyn laughed. "Why don't you get acquainted with your harp now? I'll show you how to tune it, and you can be ready for a real lesson when you bring it up to the solar."

"Super!" cried David.

Amlyth, with a strange expression, excused himself and left.

Lesson time in the solar, with Dame Isolde apparently napping, was a continuation of David's thrilled discovery and exploration of the troubadour. He was brilliantly quick. He looked so handsome with his flushed cheeks that Lyn remembered another harpist named David who was beautiful and ruddy of countenance in the days before he was king.

Mrs. Frobisher returned from dinner at the end of the lesson and watched, enthralled, her head cocked like a large, inquisitive bird's.

"Bless the boy," she exclaimed, as David reluctantly got up to go to dinner with Lyn. "Music in bone and marrow, and no mistake!" To Lyn she added, "Don't bolt your food, love. Mr. Amlyth says he'll come at nine so's I can get home."

Amlyth had waited for them. As he carved the roast

and David passed the plates, there was a family kind of intimacy to the meal which Lyn enjoyed so much it frightened her.

They were *not* a family. She must not let herself pretend or day-dream. Amlyth might even be a murderer; it was what he would term "an objective possibility."

"What a glum face, Linnet," bantered Amlyth. "Do you loathe cauliflower that much?"

"What?" She jumped, laughed nervously. "Oh, I -"

"What you need is a day out of Belleforest, a day in the sun. And tomorrow you shall have it. Kate will be back in the morning. So you, David, and I can take a picnic lunch and go roving."

"We can't dump everything on Kate."

"Why not? She's been recuperating, frolicking about with dear Cousin Timothy, while we've looked after her employer. Besides, Mrs. Frobisher can help till it seems safe to leave mother on her own with Corbie. Where shall we take your teacher, David?"

David's eyes sparkled. It occurred to Lyn that he had probably rarely been further than the nearest market town ten miles away, since Megan had no car.

"Corfe?" he asked imploringly.

"It's close enough," said Amlyth. "But why Corfe?"

"I saw a picture of it once. It looks strange and beautiful and peaceful in its ruins after all that happened. Edward was martyred there, it was where King John kept prisoners, and it was the last stronghold to defy Cromwell's forces during the Revolution. I've always wanted to go."

"Now I want to," said Lyn.

"Then Corfe it is." Amlyth passed his cup for coffee. "We'll ask cook to pack us a nice lunch, and we'll leave right after breakfast."

They were all three at breakfast next morning when Kate appeared, raised her eyebrows, and gave a cool smile.

"My, how domestic! David, I'm terribly sorry your grandmother has vanished, but I'm sure she'll be located soon. May I intrude long enough for toast and coffee?"

"You live here, sweet Kate." Amlyth pulled out a chair for her. "How was London?"

"Overrun by Americans, and you wouldn't believe the virtual hordes of hippies from everywhere—sleeping in the parks, festering in all the free spots of interest, demonstrating in Trafalgar Square, washing in the fountains! Terrible!"

Amlyth chuckled. "Why don't you consider it a kind of young United Nations, a global melting pot?"

"Pot is exactly what they're melted in."

"Potted flower children are surely less oppressive than boozing soldiers, which used to be the way young people saw each other's countries."

"You're quite impossible, Amlyth. There have to be standards."

"Yes, but whose?"

Lyn interposed. "Did you get to some good plays and concerts?"

"Two wonderful concerts." Kate brightened. "One indifferent play and one very good one. And of course we did some shopping."

"Of course," murmured Amlyth. "And in stores presumably unfrequented by foreign hordes, at least the indigent ones!"

Kate gave him a look of real malice. "When I'm not around you, I don't believe anyone can possibly be so difficult. But it doesn't take long to realize you're unspeakable. Especially when one meets a gentleman."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Amlyth, bowing from the waist. "You'll have a respite from my company today, at least. We're off to Corfe on a picnic."

"Corfe? That old ruin?"

"To each his own." Amlyth rose and grinned at David. "Ask cook for the lunch. Linnet, bring a cardigan or light coat, it can be brisk along the seacoast."

With some trouble, Amlyth maneuvered the big wicker

basket into half of the tiny Riley Elf's back seat while David got in next to it.

"Mother's Silver Shadow hasn't been out of the garage in years," said Amlyth, nodding at the sleek Rolls Royce installed in the larger half of the garage. "This little Elf is the general run-about everyone else uses."

"It's a sweet car," Lyn said, rather enjoying the bumps as they drove along the lane.

David stared out the opposite window as they passed the mill cottage. Lyn could think of nothing honestly helpful to say, but she hoped the day itself would lift his spirits.

It was perfect weather, sunny but with a refreshing breeze, and the greens of pastures, fields, forests, and gardens were so vivid that Lyn wondered why Ireland, not England, was called the Emerald Isle.

Apart from her taxi ride from London, this was her first intimate look at the countryside. They passed houses of flint and whitewashed cob, with windows peeking from under thatch like eyes. There were long barns, placid black and white cattle, hills tufted with sheep, and clean-limbed horses. In each village there was a gray church hedged about with tilting gravestones.

Saxon, Norman, medieval, and Tudor mingled with modern. Inns with centuries-old signs promised that within one could buy Cokes. New multiple-unit housing developments were springing up outside towns that had once been Roman camps or Viking settlements.

Old, old, old, yet very much alive.

"We're shaving the edge of the New Forest," Amlyth explained, slowing down as they passed herds of small, shaggy ponies grazing boldly by the road and racing each other through the yellow, blooming gorse.

"This is where William Rufus was killed by an arrow one of his men intended for a stag," put in David. "And it was called the New Forest because William the Conqueror set it aside as a royal hunting preserve."

"Almost a thousand years ago," marveled Lyn. "Why are all the ponies running loose?"

"They belong in common to New Forest people. Every

year they're rounded up and sold. Tough little beasts, some of them wild as hawks."

"But they look so happy and free."

"That's how they can stay for all of me," said Amlyth.

They stopped for tea at a pretty, thatched inn hung with flower baskets. Though Lyn was not hungry, she couldn't resist the raisin scones that Amlyth and David heaped lavishly with clotted cream and black currant jam.

"I'd gain twenty pounds if I kept on like this," she sighed, enjoying the room with its burnished copper and pewter, its mammoth old fireplace, and its black-beamed, whitewashed ceilings. "These parts of England are too good to be true. I feel as if I'm in a fairy tale."

"A trip up to the manufacturing cities in the Midlands would bring you back to earth," said Amlyth. "But it is a wonderful country. It's endured a lot and has much more to endure, but I'm proud of it."

Lyn puckered her forehead at him. "And you still don't resent the hairy young travelers?"

"Why? They can see with their eyes that England is a long way from finished, they can see what we gave the world, though they won't admire all of it." Amlyth laughed. "After all, we've absorbed wave after wave of savage tribes, Vikings, Normans, Romans, not to mention warring for centuries with France and Spain before the last two struggles with Germany. We've survived rich American tourists. I'm sure we can live through the hippies and students."

They were in gently rolling hills now. "I see it," David shouted, leaning forward. "That has to be Corfe."

On the top of the highest hill in sight, far in the distance, reared what resembled a giant's shattered tooth. As they got closer, it grew in size and distinctness, till at last they were gazing up from the road curving around the base of the hill.

Iron scaffolding held up parts of the towers and walls, and reinforced the outer wall that had once ringed the entire top of the hill. They drove around the hill through the small town of Corfe, preserved in its gray stone, with its

old market cross, business streets, and several atrocious souvenir shops.

Leaving the car, they crossed a bridge over what had been a water barrier to the gently ascending approach to the castle. The three other sides were so steep that no aggressor could scramble up without being picked off at leisure by guards.

They trudged through the old gate of the outer wall, paid their admittance, and pushed through the turnstile into a vast, spreading meadow climbing slowly to the castle. The outer wall was equipped with lookout shelters. It must have been an impregnable castle till the days of gunpowder.

David kept running to the lookouts to gaze over the town below and across the meadows and hills toward the sea. As they neared the great, crumbling walls, ravens flew out of the high windows to be replaced by venturesome teen-agers who shouted dares to friends below.

"It was near this gate where Edward the Martyr was stabbed at the will of his stepmother, who wanted her own son, Ethelred, to be king," said David. "Young Edward was hunting and stopped to see his kinsmen. He asked for a drink, and as he took the goblet, he took the blade, too."

Amlyth nodded and carried on the tale. "Ethelred the Unready was the one who paid the Danegeld to bribe the Vikings to stay away, and then incredibly arranged a massacre intended to wipe out thousands of peaceful Danish settlers on St. Brice's day in 1002."

"You have a precise memory of it," Lyn said.

"Oh, some of our ancestors were slaughtered that day," Amlyth shrugged. "They were relatives of Sweyn Forkbeard, the Danish king who came in fury to avenge them and became King of England. Canute, his son, ruled after him, a good ruler and beloved, but his sons angered the people, and eventually the throne went back to the line of Alfred."

"Fascinating," said Lyn. "I knew about the Romans and the Norman invasion, of course, but I didn't realize the Vikings were more than hit-and-run looters!"

"Madame, you are speaking of my forebears," Amlyth teased.

They had entered the ruins of the castle proper, though only part of one tower remained identifiable. It had small chambers with deep windows where Lyn could sit on the ledge and peer out. Grass and bushes grew among the tumbled stones, and paths were scattered all around the pinnacle.

"There were three baileys," David explained, shielding his eyes to stare up at the top of the tower. "King John kept his great-niece, Princess Eleanor, the Pearl of Brittany and true heir to the throne, shut up in the Gloriet Tower. But she was so sweet and beautiful that her jailers let her walk along the walls." He looked over the fields and hills. "For years she must have gone from the Gloriet to the Butavant Tower, from the Butavant to the Plakement, looking out toward her home in Brittany."

"Did she die here?"

"No," said David. "She was sent to Bristol and died, still a prisoner, in her sixties. John starved her brother, Arthur, to death along with his Breton knights. Perhaps he was the luckier one."

The wind whipped strong at the height. Amlyth and Lyn sheltered in a look-out while David climbed as high as he could in the tower and waved down to them in triumph.

"This was a great idea," Lyn told Amlyth. "David's acting his age for the first time since I've met him."

Amlyth brushed a strand of hair from her forehead, gravely fixed it in place, and then tweaked it free again. "This isn't the right day for regal coronets, Linnet. Let down your hair."

"But it'll blow and tangle and—"

"Look lovely."

She frowned at him, but her heart was beating fast and his eyes felt warmer than the sunlight. With great care, he began to unpin her braids and then unplaited them, his hands lingering in the long, thick masses.

"I'll help you brush the tangles out," he said, smiling. "Linnet, I would like to brush the tangles from your hair all the rest of our lives."

"I'm sure you'd pull and get in a rush and wind up by telling me to get a pixie cut," she said, trying to joke.

"Want to place a bet?"

One could never guess at how serious he was. Lyn got to her feet as David scrambled down the slope. He stopped abruptly, gaping at her.

"Miss Lyn! Your hair! Why—why, I doubt if the Pearl of Brittany was as pretty as you. Don't ever braid it up again."

"I shall as soon as we're out of this wind," Lyn said matter-of-factly. "But thank you, David, that was a nice thing to say."

"Never mind, old chap," consoled Amlyth, slapping the boy's shoulder. "Let's go drown our sorrows in lemon squash and that big basket of lunch."

## CHAPTER XIII

No matter how Lyn fought the sense of their belonging together, there was an overwhelmingly family air to the whole outing. It was easy, too easy, to imagine that Amlyth was her husband and David their son; though he was surely Amlyth's son, as she severely reminded herself.

All three were singing as they turned up the lane, but silence fell as they neared Belleforest. When they pulled into the garage, David said softly, "That was about the best time I ever had in my life."

"There'll be more," cheered Amlyth. "But it could be a long time before we're so lucky again with weather." He laughed, helping Lyn climb out of the low-slung car "If it had been raining, I'm sure we'd never have got your hair down."

They were nearly up to the door when they saw the police car parked at the tradesmen's kitchen entrance.

Constable Leyland and a white-haired man in plain clothes were waiting in the library. Clearly unhappy, the young policeman stepped forward. His tone was frigidly correct.

"I must ask you, Mr. Drude, to kindly come with us and answer a few questions."

Amlyth stared "Why?" he demanded.

"We think perhaps you can help locate Mrs. Alworth."

"And what causes this sudden conviction?"

The white-haired man held up a plastic bag containing soft, woven purple. "This has been identified as Megan Alworth's shawl, the one she wore the night she vanished."

"Where did you find it?" Amlyth asked, apparently more interested in the clue than in the accusation.

"In your room, Mr. Drude. In the bottom of your trunk that you've told Mrs. Killigrew never to tamper with."

"The trunk? That's where I kept my field notes and reference files. Someone—" Amlyth broke off. "I suppose," he said slowly, "that there's no point in my saying I never saw the shawl before."

Leyland looked at him disapprovingly, as if he had at least thought Amlyth would admit his crime and take his punishment like a gentleman. "I do wish you'd just come along, sir."

" 'Assist in the investigation,' isn't that how the papers put it?" quizzed Amlyth. "May I tell my mother goodnight?"

"Certainly, Mr. Drude."

A smothered cry came from David. He hurled himself on Amlyth, grappling for his throat. "You did it! Where is she? What have you done with my Gran?"

Amlyth held the boy by the shoulders. "I didn't do it, David. I swear I never saw that shawl till just now."

"Then how did it get in your trunk?"

"I don't know." After releasing the trembling boy, Am-

lyth ran his hand across his face in a dazed way. "Someone must have put it there."

Constable Leyland's face hardened. "Better go up to your mother, sir. We should be on our way."

Numbed, Lyn tried to put her arm around David. He jerked away, staring at Amlyth, who paused at the elevator.

"Linnet," Amlyth said, "be very, very careful. Because whoever is behind all this is on the loose. There's no telling what they'll try next." He disappeared into the elevator.

"He—he caught Gran that night in the woods—hid her or killed her." Clenching his fists, David shook with dry sobs of outrage. "And all this time, he's been hunting and telling me she'll come back and pre—pre—pretending to care!—I wish they would hang him today!"

"David, hush." Lyn got a grasp on his shoulder and wouldn't let him go this time. "If he did it, he'll be punished, but there's a chance that he didn't, a chance that someone wanted him blamed and put the shawl there."

She whirled to Constable Leyland.

"Can you tell me how you came to look in the chest?"

"An anonymous caller—a woman—called the department. Said that we'd find important evidence about the disappearance in a trunk in Mr. Drude's room." He added self righteously, "Of course we got permission first, miss, even though we do have a warrant."

"From whom?"

"Well, since Mr. Drude was out and Dr. Hallenby advised us not to disturb Dame Isolde, we asked Miss Roxborough. She was most cooperative—gave us the run of the house."

"Really? Perhaps she gave you the trunk key, too?"

Leyland flushed. "Miss, surely if you'd been here, you'd have helped?" demanded the white-haired man.

Lyn bit her lip. She had no retort to that. "How long will you keep Mr. Drude?"

"Haven't a glimmer, miss," said the older man. "He

may come back as soon as he's answered a few questions, or he may have to stay for a while. All depends on whether there's enough grounds for charging and holding him."

"The shawl—that's all you found?" asked David with a contorted face.

"Yes, lad." Constable Leyland added comfortingly, "There was no blood on it, no rips or signs of violence."

"Doesn't it seem strange that anyone would keep such a piece of evidence in their room?" asked Lyn.

"Lord love you, miss, they do it all the time." The detective rubbed his chin. "Seems like some of them want to gloat, but more want to get caught."

"Then why doesn't he say he did it?" cried David. "Why won't he tell where Gran is? You've got to make him tell."

"David," Lyn said sharply, "screaming won't help. Go take a shower and come to dinner."

"Dinner? I can't eat. I'm not hungry. I have to know what he's done to Gran."

"What you have to do is hold yourself together so you'll be some use to her when she is found." Lyn steered David toward his room, wanting him out of the way before Amlyth came down. "If you can't control yourself, I'll have Dr. Hallenby give you a sedative."

Eyes widening as if he had just seen a new and terrifying possibility, David shrank from her and said under his breath, "Maybe you helped him! Did you? Did you?"

Lyn spread her hands, astounded. "David!"

He whirled and ran down the corridor. The detective shook his head. "Hard on the youngster. He and his grannie were main fond of each other. The village folk say she always set herself above them, kept to herself. But that might of been on account of what happened to her daughter. Some people are so proud they won't abide neighbors' whispers—and so they get no good will, either."

"Megan wasn't popular, then?"

"Wouldn't call it that, miss. She spoke gracious to everyone when she came to the village shopping. But she never stopped for a chat or cup of tea and never went to church."

Lyn could understand that. If Megan's daughter had to lie outside holy ground, why should Megan care to walk on it? And it was easy to see why her calm self-sufficiency, at first a necessity, had grown into a wall that cut her off from more ordinary people.

A purple shawl of finest hand-looming. Lyn smiled in spite of everything. It would not have been easy to come by, like pinks or blues, reds, greens, whites, or blacks. Megan had worn the royal color over her faded cotton clothes.

At one time, what dreams she must have cherished for her daughter. Mistress of Belleforest! But then followed the shame, the sniggering from neighbors, and at length, the suicide of her beloved daughter.

Strange that Megan had apparently forgiven Amlyth and named him David's guardian. Of course, for David's welfare, that was the most advantageous course. Megan would sacrifice anything for him.

The elevator opened. Amlyth stepped out. Lyn crossed to this man whom she knew she loved. She could not believe he would harm Megan. And yet yet—

What did she know of him? They had spent a beautiful day in the wind and sun, they had met in the Silver Wood and walked in the forest. She loved him. But she did not know him.

"Linnet." He dropped his hands lightly and firmly on her shoulders. "I don't have any notion as to who's playing tricks, but they're deadly, and almost certainly in this household or very closely intertwined with it. So don't trust anyone, and for God's sake and your own safety, keep your eyes open and your door locked!"

True concern or a clever act?

"I will be careful," Lyn said. "I—I—Good luck, Amlyth."

"Have a care for the boy," he called back over his shoulder. "Don't let him wander off alone. Mother doesn't know about the shawl. Don't tell her unless you have to."

Then Amlyth was gone with the policemen.

Lyn walked stiffly back to her room. The Drude faces seemed to taunt her from the portraits and reflections. She

hesitated at David's door. What was the best way to be sure he didn't run off or do something wild?

"David?" she called.

There was a scuffling sound. "What do you want?" came his muffled voice.

"I want you to freshen up and meet me for dinner in ten minutes," Lyn said briskly. "We've got to talk over ways to help your grandmother."

"How do I know you didn't help *him?*"

"If you don't trust me, you'd better go stay with Thomas and his wife. But depend on one thing, David. Going off on your own won't help Megan, and if the police have to hunt you, they won't have much time to look for her."

Silence. More scuffling. "I won't leave now," David conceded. "But they'd better find my grandmother pretty fast or—or I'll do something!"

"Then I'll see you in the dining room," Lyn said.

Across the hall in her room, she looked into the mirror. She had not got her hair braided evenly.

Taking it down, she remembered how Amlyth had done that. Her hands began to tremble She threw herself across the bed and cried till her head throbbed and she had no more tears.

The storm cleared her mind. By the time she sat down to dinner across from David, acutely conscious of Amlyth's empty place, Lyn had looked squarely at things she had blocked out before or had thought too far-fetched to consider. She felt it best to share these ventures with David, if only to show him that Amlyth was not positively guilty.

"David," she began, sorting the kidney out of the steak and kidney pie, "I think we have to look at everybody around Belleforest as if they were a suspect, think of motivations, see if they had a chance to cause your grandmother's disappearance or either of the deaths we believed to be accidental. Some people can be eliminated right away, for example, Dame Isolde and Corbie have been in the solar, and in no emotional shape to spirit away your grandmother."

"Mr. Drude could have done all three things," said David. "He could have pushed his father, killed Jock to shut his mouth, and then done something with my grandmother."

"All right. He certainly has to be on our list. But why would he do any of these things?"

"He may have wanted to have Belleforest now instead of later. And he could have done away with Gran because she knew too much." David gave Lyn a sullen, defiant look. "It could be he wanted to marry someone and didn't want Gran around to tell how he treated my mother."

"That last is unlikely, David, but the first reason is plausible. I hope you'll exclude me from the possibilities, since I just got to Belleforest and couldn't have wanted to do away with anyone."

"That's so," David said grudgingly. "Anyway, we're wasting time. Mr. Drude did it all."

"The police can't charge him, David. I don't think you should, either, at least not until we've studied on the alternatives."

He scowled but gave a wave of his hand. "I don't see that Sally, Mary, the gardeners, Mrs. Killigrew, or cook would gain anything, even if any of them had the nerve or was wicked enough."

"I think we can pass them for the moment."

"Well," said David, "That only leaves Miss Roxborough."

"I think Dr. Hallenby's been around enough to be included in our examination," mused Lyn. "Now, let's see—I met Kate in the hall shortly after old Mr. Drude fell."

"But she was in London when Gran vanished."

"That might have been a good alibi."

"But she was with Mrs. Hallenby."

"That's what Dr. Hallenby said. We don't really know. One thing we must remember is that several people could have worked together in this."

"Oh, but Dr. Hallenby's jolly nice. Everyone likes him."

"It's not fair to suspect Amlyth without taking a look at the others," Lyn reminded him sternly.

"But why would Dr. Hallenby get mixed up in it?"

"Well, while we're recklessly spinning yarns, how about this? Supposing he thought it would be nice if Kate inherited Belleforest? Supposing they had felt this would happen, before Amlyth came back to threaten Kate's influence with Dame Isolde?" Lyn paused and then went on as David stared in fascinated horror. "So the doctor decides to make things look very bad for Amlyth and gilds the framing process by planting your grandmother's shawl in that trunk. Even if Amlyth stays out of prison, his mother is not likely to make him her heir when she suspects he killed her husband!"

"Now you're being far-fetched," David scoffed.

"It's pretty far-fetched to kill or kidnap people."

David cast a worried glance over his shoulder. "Do you really think—" he began. "How will we act?"

"I think we'd better act as if we think Amlyth guilty—and be very, very careful. Don't go walking without Thomas or me."

Shoving away from the table, David hung his head. "I—I don't know what I'll do if Gran isn't found soon." His jaw was ridged and his voice shook. "I hope the police make him talk. They've got to."

Lyn finished her coffee, but it tasted very bitter. Nothing had softened David. He believed Amlyth had done those dreadful things; and though it sickened Lyn in body and spirit to acknowledge the weight of motivation and evidence, Amlyth had both the most reason and the likeliest opportunities.

A lesson for David that evening was out of the question, but Lyn decided to look in on Dame Isolde.

The air of the solar fairly tingled with recent strife. Dame Isolde sat erect, disregarding Corbie, who pressed against her knee as if to remind her of his presence. Kate, with a too bright smile, rose hastily.

"Oh, Lyn, dear. How nice of you to fill in till Mrs. Frobisher comes. We've had such a stack of bills and letters that I'm exhausted."

"And ready to trot off on another pleasure trip, no doubt," cut in her employer acidly. "If you can't hold up to the pressure, Kate, we can hire you an assistant. Miss Heath might even—"

"Thank you very much indeed," said Kate in icy tones. "But I'm sure that anyone would feel tired after eight hours of dictation. It is easier to talk than write, Dame Isolde."

"You baggage! Do you taunt me with my infirmity?"

"No! I'm just trying to make you see reason—which is damned well impossible!"

Kate flung out of the room. Dame Isolde glared for a moment, cracking her knuckles with unbelievable vigor and loudness. Then her face seemed to break into wreaths. She threw back her carefully done red hair and cackled.

"See how nervous she is of losing her job? A good thing, too! Any time a secretary feels she can take a mini-holiday when she pleases, her ideas of grandeur need deflating! Is David coming up tonight?"

"He wasn't feeling too well, and I thought if he was coming down with a cold or flu, you shouldn't be exposed to it."

"Good thinking!" Dame Isolde applauded, though she looked disappointed. "He's quite a lad, isn't he? Fancy, he was playing that harp the day he got it!"

"He has unusual talent."

"But the drive, Miss Heath! Has he got the drive?" Dame Isolde leaned forward, a fearful intensity in her sightless eyes. "Amlyth had the talent! It was the will he lacked—or rather, he forged his will to thwart mine!"

"He finds his work interesting and useful."

"Pfah!"

"At any rate, David wants to study, and I have faith he'll do brilliantly."

"He must!"

"Please, Dame Isolde," pleaded Lyn. "No one likes to feel they're being shoved."

"You think I'm a pushy old woman?"

Lyn hesitated. "Yes, I do," she said, deciding that diplomacy was a waste of time, that this human juggernaut must not roll over David, crushing out his incentive and love for music.

Dame Isolde nodded, grimly pleased. "Good! I'm glad you have the courage to tell the truth for your pupil's sake. Now, for my sake, will you play?"

"Ballads?" piped Corbie, plucking at her skirt. "Ballads, lassie?"

"If you will sing," Lyn smiled at him. And so they had music.

At nine Mrs. Frobisher came, since she would be spending nights in the solar for a while. What with the private detective patrolling the house, there was an air of siege about the place. Lyn nodded to the middle-aged man sitting in the central hall. He was on duty nights and periodically rode up the elevator to check the second floor and the solar. Lyn wondered if he ever went over to the walled-off side where Mr. Drude and Jock had died. She never wanted to go there, yet it seemed uncanny for half of this great house to stand empty.

Would the wall ever come down? Would children ever laugh and play on the roof where poor, drunken Mr. Drude had walked? And if there were children, whose would they be?

Turning down the corridor to her room, Lyn heard a thudding sound from Amlyth's room. Was he back? She tapped on the door.

No answer. "Amlyth?" she called softly.

There were steps in the hall. "Here, Linnet!" he hailed, advancing with hands outstretched.

She stepped back, pointing at his room. "Then—who's in there?"

"We'll soon find out." He yanked the door open.

Kate stood by the trunk. Amlyth stepped inside, pulling Lyn with him. "Well, Kate? Playing detective? Or maybe you were arranging more evidence?"

"I—I -" Straightening, Kate took her hand from her throat. "I apologize for intruding, Amlyth, but there was no way of knowing when you'd be back, and we're at a point in Dame Isolde's memoirs where I must check dates and names in some scrapbooks your mother says she stored in your lower bureau drawer, because they're about your childhood and she thought you'd like them one day."

"Excellent story," Amlyth nodded. "Did you find these ever-so-handy scrapbooks?"

"I was just looking when I heard a knock." Kate tossed Lyn a resentful glance.

Amlyth gestured to the bureau. "Don't let me stop you."

Kate bent, pulled out the heavy lowest drawer, and took out three leather-bound scrapbooks with dates stamped in gold beside the name AMLYTH lettered in old English script.

"Do you want to inspect them?" Kate gibed.

"Not now," said Amlyth, walking her to the door. "Go in peace, Kate. For the night, at least."

"What does that mean?" she asked, whirling. "The police must not have charged you, or you wouldn't be here."

"Perfect deduction! But they hope to be charging someone very soon, and not just with Megan's disappearance."

Kate's face was bloodless. "What—what are you talking about?"

Amlyth put an arm around Lyn as if to steady her against what was coming. "Experts who have examined Jock's body say he could not have killed himself. Someone else swung the knife, wiped off their prints, and put the weapon in Jock's hands. The killer probably shoved my father first."

Lyn shuddered against Amlyth. Kate leaned for a moment on the door, shut her eyes as if stunned, and then faltered, "But—but who—?"

"Eenie, meenie, miney, moe," said Amlyth. "Good-

night, sweet Kate. May angels or whatever you fancy sing you to sleep." He eased her into the hall and stayed at the door.

"Come, Linnet," he said, with a touch of his old mockery. "If you stay in a man's room after dark, thou shalt not 'scape calumny."

The strain of the last days and her fear over him tonight flooded over Lyn. Tears stung her eyes.

"Can't you ever be serious?" she demanded.

"What shall we be serious about, Linnet? Or, rather, how shall we be serious? I assure you that I am. It's not much fun to see circumstantial evidence closing in on you with the accusations growing more appalling by the day." He gave a short laugh. "I'm one of the most serious men you've ever seen."

"You don't have any idea of who might be behind it all?"

"Kate?" Amlyth shrugged. "Possibly, if she had someone to do the dirty work, but I really don't think so. Mother? It's conceivable she might 'arrange' for a man she despised to fall, but I can't believe she'd order Jock killed, and besides, how would she have it done, and why should she want Megan out of the way?" Amlyth turned his back, shaking his head. "Any way one looks at it, I'm the prime suspect, darling."

Darling? Did he know he had called her that? Leading her out of his room and across to hers, Amlyth kissed her hands and held them to his face.

"At least there's no death penalty," he teased. "I won't be hung for a crime I didn't do." He nodded toward David's room. "How is he?"

"I haven't seen him since dinner."

Amlyth frowned. "Maybe we should just say goodnight."

He rapped. When no answer came, Lyn called, then Amlyth called, and at last Amlyth opened the door.

The bed was unslept.in. A book of easy music lay open on the stand near the troubadour. Paperweighted in the middle of the desk was a piece of paper.

*"Miss Linnet,"* it read in large, bold letters, *"Don't worry about me, please. I've gone to find Gran."*

# CHAPTER XIV

Amlyth sat down on the bed as if his legs had gone out from under him. "The young fool. Out running around, with a murderer on the loose."

"He promised not to go," Lyn breathed, stricken, feeling to blame. "What shall we do?"

"Call the police to start." Amlyth hauled himself to his feet, and Lyn realized how bone-weary he must be. "Then I'll search the mill cottage and alert Thomas and the gardeners to have their eyes open. There's not much use plunging around in the woods at night, that'll have to wait till morning."

"We might stop at the wych elm where his mother's buried," Lyn suggested. "He used to spend a lot of time there."

"We?" questioned Amlyth. "You're staying here."

"No, I'm not. If you won't take me with you, I'll cut through the woods alone."

"Damnation!"

"Call the police," said Lyn, going into her room. "I'll put on slacks and walking shoes—and if you don't wait for me, I'll go by myself."

When she came out, he was briefing the detective in the hall, who seemed rather put out about the whole thing.

"How do I know who's supposed to be here and who isn't?" he growled. "That old battle-axe, Mrs. Frobisher, almost hit me when I asked her for identification, and that Miss Roxborough is all over the place. Sally's boy friend wants to snuggle, and they both get sore when I won't let him in, so then she crawls out a window. That doctor has

a key and comes and goes like he owned the place. And now this boy's run off."

"You can't expect pay for watching normal houses," Amlyth reminded him. "We'll lock the door to our corridor when we go out so you needn't worry about it."

"He's hardly the daring private eye-type one imagines," said Lyn as they went to the garage. "What did the police say?"

"They'll watch for David but can't really look till daylight." Amlyth backed the car out and swung it sharply around on the drive. "I suppose they'll find some way to suspect me for his leaving, unless he turns up pretty quickly."

"He left while you were with the police."

"Yes, but who's to prove I didn't hustle him out just before appearing so dramatically to you and Kate?" Amlyth gave a mirthless chuckle. "And of course I might have an accomplice. You, for instance."

"Me? Why on earth would I get mixed up in all these weird goings-on? I haven't lived here a week yet, and never met you till then."

"True. But the police think it's strange your appearance and my return coincided."

"You mean—they think we knew each other before?"

"It wouldn't be the first time a pair of lovers did away with a few impediments to possession of property they desired."

It took Lyn a few minutes to absorb this, but when she had, she laughed incredulously.

"Well, I hope they have a good time checking. They won't find anyone remotely like you in my past, and since you've been in the wilds of Africa for years, the whole thing is incredible."

"Except for one thing."

"What?"

The headlights gleamed golden on the hedges as they wheeled around curves. "I was in New York to see a publisher about my book before I came here—and it seems to have been during the time you were in the city before flying to London."

"But—but millions of people pass through New York!"

"We happen to be the two they're interested in."

They passed over the bridge, the carlights washing the flint cottage as Amlyth pulled up by it.

"Do you want to wait in the car?" he asked.

Lyn shook her head emphatically and climbed out.

Amlyth used the knocker and waited a moment. "It seems strange to just walk into someone's home," he said. "But we have to."

He turned the knob, felt for a light switch, and found one that flicked on a reading lamp by an armchair near the fireplace. A smaller chair was opposite, and on a trestle table in between lay a violin and bow, knitting needles tucked into a half-finished sweater, several books, and some garish seed catalogs.

The fireplace was flanked by shelves, one holding books, the other a small television. In one corner, where the light would be best by day, was Megan's sewing machine, ironing board, and several dress forms. The white walls had a curious picture worked with what seemed to be human hair, and one good copy of a Ryder, with sulphurous clouds and stormy waves.

"That's not a picture you'd expect to find in a cottage," Lyn said.

Turning on the kitchen light and ducking to enter, Amlyth asked over his shoulder, "How many Megans do you find in cottages?"

The kitchen was small, scrubbed, and bright, with copper pots and utensils and blue-and-white oilcloth and curtains. Lyn stepped out into the back garden and called, but no one answered.

"The sleeping rooms are upstairs," Amlyth said, leading the way up.

The upstairs echoed the rooms below in size, David having littered the larger room with games, clothes, old exercise books, and boyish miscellany. Megan's bed had a nightstand by it with a chair and chest of drawers a few steps from its foot. A chintz-covered clothing rack ran along one wall. It was all as tidy and compact as the small sewing kit on the chest.

There was no sign that anyone had been here since the night Megan disappeared. "Well, that's that," said Amlyth.

They drove back to Belleforest and roused Thomas, who sleepily said he had not seen David but would tell his helpers to keep a sharp look-out.

Garaging the car, Amlyth leaned on the wheel a moment. "Do you feel like walking to the churchyard?"

"Let's do. Then that's all we can try for the night."

He caught her hand and pressed it as they cut through the grounds to the walled garden. "Are you this good when things are normal, or are you great in crises and terrible day-to-day?"

"I have no idea," she said primly. "I don't think I ever had a real crisis till about three months ago, and since then I haven't been able to catch my breath."

"Three months ago? Did you flee to England to glue a broken heart back together, or were the revenuers after you, or—"

"I felt it was time to see some new people and places," Lyn said evasively.

How long ago and far away Morgan seemed. Would she ever feel so detached about Amlyth? She was sure she wouldn't. He was a man she might love or hate, but not one to whom she could ever grow indifferent.

As they entered the woods beyond the garden, Lyn wondered if Amlyth had walked here with David's mother, and if he were remembering it. He had told David that he had loved the girl. Lyn felt a queer pang of jealousy.

"Why so silent?" Amlyth queried.

Startled, Lyn blurted out, "Amlyth—aren't you David's father? You look so much alike. And you say you loved his mother."

"I did. But I can't be his father." He hesitated, and then explained painfully, "I never made love to her past kissing."

"Then who was it?"

"My father? Some visiting cousin?" Amlyth shrugged. "She wouldn't tell me—or marry me, either, once she was

pregnant, even though I begged her, swore I'd love the child. That was why I went away."

Lyn believed him. With a great rush of relief, she held tighter to his hand. "She must have loved you very much and been very proud not to have gone on with your marriage."

"She was Megan's daughter. She was proud." He added softly, "And till I met you, she was my only love."

"Kate—"

"Kate was proximity and sex and what mother wanted."

Flinching, Lyn said, "That's pretty brutal."

"It got that way, Linnet, when I announced that I would not be marrying her. Ungentlemanly of me, no doubt, but once I understood what love was, nothing could have made me settle for less."

They walked quietly for a while, stopping now and then to listen, but meeting only birds disturbed from their perches.

"Why did you come back, Amlyth?"

He jerked his head in the direction of Belleforest. "That blind, proud old woman—our blood is thicker than water. I wanted to see for myself how she was. And then—"

"What?"

He moved his shoulders restively. "I never knew my father well; scarcely saw him, in fact, even before he took to pacing the railing. But I've long had a feeling that something was wrong with him, and I knew mother could be ruthless with people she thinks have defiled their talent." He laughed uneasily. "I didn't think she'd lock him in the cellar on bread and water, mind you. But I did suspect he'd get little help from her, and in that, at least, I was certainly right, even if he didn't fall till I began my safeguarding precautions."

They came out of the trees near the church and moved silently over the knoll toward the wych elm. The dainty tree spread down its limbs like a flowing umbrella, but when Lyn peered beneath the leaves, there was only the small, white headstone.

Lyn had hoped more than she knew that David would

be there. "Why did he go off?" she cried, swallowing a knot of fear that was growing in her throat. "Where can he be?"

"Oh, he'll know dozens of safe hideaways," comforted Amlyth, drawing her away from the grave. "Besides, he may get hungry, or see some sense along with daylight, and come home. It was a jolt, that shawl in my trunk."

"But—but we talked at dinner and I showed him how it could be several other people. He seemed to agree."

"Had to make you feel it safe to leave him alone," said Amlyth. "Anyway, like the police, he might think you were helping me. Let's get home, Linnet. Nothing more we can do tonight."

It was one o'clock by the time they had spoken with the detective, who viewed them disapprovingly and said that he hadn't seen anyone but them since Miss Roxborough had gone upstairs. They peered in David's room again, exchanged frustrated glances, and said good night.

Exhausted, Lyn tumbled into bed and sank immediately into a deep, hard sleep. She awoke just as suddenly. She gazed through the window to the Silver Wood, spangled with light from the late-rising moon.

Did she see someone moving there, or was it just one of the many shadows? Heart thudding, she watched as the silvers, blacks, and grays moved back and forth.

There was no one there. She was just nervous. But what had waked her so abruptly? The clock pointed to three, but alarm had quickened her senses. She felt wide awake.

After a brief struggle to drift off again, she got up and sat in the chair by the window, staring out at the trees.

A fairy tale wood, a wood for lovers. But other things lurked in both fairy tales and forests. There was the wolf Red Riding Hood met, the wolf who jumped into granny's bed and pretended to be a sweet old lady.

Lyn sat bolt upright. There was one more person involved with Belleforest who might have made Megan vanish and put the shawl in Amlyth's trunk.

Megan herself!

Catching up her robe, Lyn unlocked her door, ran

across to Amlyth's and knocked. "Amlyth!" she called. "Amlyth!"

"What is it, miss?" panted the detective, running down the corridor and rubbing sleep from his eyes.

"I—I need to talk to Mr. Drude!"

"Indeed, miss," said the man, ruffled at being frightened and caught out asleep. "Can't it wait till morning?"

"If it could, I wouldn't be out here," Lyn snapped.

She tried the door, found it unlocked, and pushed it open. Amlyth had never gone to bed.

Where was he? And if he had gone out again without telling her, did it mean that he was guilty, as guilty as he seemed?

The detective touched her arm. "Gentlemen will rove of nights, miss. Better get back to your own room." And stop waking me up, his manner added.

"You didn't see him leave?"

"No, miss, but then I can't watch all the doors from the main hall. Got to count on good sense from people."

"Oh. Then I suppose I might as well go back to sleep," said Lyn. "Sorry to have made a row."

"Can't blame you for being on edge," he said more affably. "Now you lock your door, miss. There's too many folk around here turning up missing."

"You don't think someone kidnapped Mr. Drude?"

"Lord love you, no, miss. There's no sign of a struggle here. I never heard a sound. He walked out on his own two legs of his own free will, be sure of that." He gave her a paternal pat on the shoulder and a broad wink. "Just go to sleep, love, and when you wake up in the morning he'll be back bright as a new penny and no harm done, eh?"

"I'm sure you're right." Lyn smiled. But as soon as she closed her door, she began to dress in the clothes she had worn earlier that night.

There was one place where Megan might be. She was more likely to be found unawares by night than by day, by one person rather than by a pack of searchers or policemen. If Amlyth were there, too—well, it was time, and more than time, to know the truth.

Lacing her shoes securely, Lyn pulled on a cardigan, opened her door, passed through the corridor, and slipped outside.

The trees were too thick for the moon to penetrate except in an occasional clearing, but Lyn could see enough to follow the main path she and Amlyth had walked a few hours ago, and to locate the first main turning. This overgrown way had been hard to trace by day, and now she had to move by memory and instinct, but she should spot the tower if she came anywhere near it.

With Amlyth, she had not been frightened at the flight of disturbed birds or rustlings in the bushes, but she started now at every sound.

Still, if what she thought was true, she must be sure of it before she told the police, or they might investigate in such a fashion that Megan would go into permanent hiding far away and leave Amlyth accused of hideous crimes, if not legally punishable for them.

Such a cloud would darken his whole life. And if his mother believed him a murderer, wouldn't she react with hatred and probably disinherit him?

An unsolved crime could dog the suspect in ways more subtle and far-reaching than one of which he was plainly convicted.

But why would Megan go to such deadly lengths?

Could she hate Amlyth because of her daughter, thinking he should somehow have prevented that self-destruction? Or was it that Dame Isolde's interest in David had made Megan dream that the boy might be master of Belleforest if the true heir could be estranged?

It was fantastic, fantastic that Megan, whom Lyn had admired on sight, might be the evil plaguing Belleforest. But someone had to be. Lyn could not, would not, believe it was Amlyth.

She had strayed off the path and had to weave through a thicket, snatched at by briars that caught her hands and cut her ankles. Once through, she halted to get her breath.

Far to the right she saw a pale glimmer. She had overshot a bit, but that must be the tower.

Making her way swiftly, Lyn kept the ghostly building in sight as she plunged through the underbrush. Outside the place she hesitated.

It had seemed plain and easy when she started: she would just have to discover if Megan was here. Now Lyn wondered desperately how to go about this.

She didn't want to alert Megan, but how could she be sure the old woman was there unless she saw her? And how could Lyn see her without a light? But a light, even if she had brought one, would surely wake her quarry.

Lyn studied the tall, round building and felt more hopeful as she noticed the tall, narrow windows. Those would let in some moonlight; enough, surely, to make out a sleeping person from the bundles of hay.

Taking a deep breath, Lyn eased through the door, which still hung on one hinge as it had the day someone had struck her from behind. She glanced over her shoulder, but only the moon-blanched space about the tower was between her and the black forest.

She went carefully through the sweet smell of curing hay toward the loft ladder, took off her shoes, prayed that the ladder wouldn't squeak, and started up.

The wood groaned, slightly, but that only merged with the other creaks and sounds of an old building whose wooden parts were rotting and worm-gnawed.

Lyn reached the top, crawled forward on her knees, and stopped till her heartbeat no longer thundered in her ears. Slashes of cold, white light fell from the high windows. She caught in her breath. Someone had been here since she and Amlyth had searched it a few days ago.

In one corner, the bales of hay formed an angle reaching halfway to the ceiling. Perhaps they stretched solid to the wall. Perhaps they didn't. . . .

Lyn moved forward as quietly as she could. Then she saw the narrow gap between the last bales and the wall; there was just enough room to squeeze through. She

worked toward it, and then gazed into a tiny cubicle defined by bales.

There was a bed on the straw, but no one was in it; the white sheets and pillow testified to that. Mystified, Lyn started to turn.

A hard thrust sent her plunging forward. She fell on the pallet, scrambled up, and saw Megan blocking the narrow gap.

"I've a butcher knife in my hand, love! Don't come close."

"Megan! So it *was* you!"

"Ah, you got a notion, did you? Too bad. Davie was rare fond of you. Had you minded your own business, ye might have been his teacher—teacher to the new young master of Belleforest!"

"Aren't you forgetting Amlyth Drude?"

"He?" snorted Megan. "If he's not put away for murder, I'll see something happens to him. And then who'll there be of the Drude line except my David?"

"He is a Drude?"

"Indeed he be," Megan boasted. "But he's not Amlyth's get!"

"Is he Amlyth's half-brother by old Mr. Drude?"

Megan laughed shrilly. "Ah, you're a shrewd lass! But it all depends on which old Mr. Drude you mean. Davie was sired by Amlyth's uncle—and it was Amlyth's uncle who took such a fall. Amlyth's father died long since."

Lyn was so startled that she almost forgot her own peril. "How can that be?" she cried.

"Haven't you heard the brothers were twins?"

"But I don't understand."

"Then listen. Isolde yearned for a man with music in him as great as her own. When Amlyth's father dwindled from her hopes, she fell in love with his brother, who was beginning a brave career, they say. Now, Corbie worshipped his mistress and he leagued with her lover to see that her husband drove over a cliff one night and burned past recognition in his brother's car."

"Dame Isolde knew all this?"

"Not till it was done. And she loved the man who had

killed his twin for her, and had no wish to see her faithful Corbie hang for a man she had grown to despise. So," giggled Megan, "Amlyth has had his uncle for a father these seventeen years and never known the difference!"

"How did you find out?"

"Well, lass, there was poison in Dame Isolde's and her lover's bed. They soon came to a rare loathing of each other, and he set eyes on my daughter."

Megan's voice grew hard. "Like everything he wanted, he found a way to get her. But he had nightmares over what he'd done, and told it to Elaine. All full of the terror of it she was, and asked me if she should tell Amlyth. I said would she cause more murder in the family and so she sealed her lips. She broke off with his uncle when she started to meet Amlyth, but then she learned she was with child—"

The old voice dropped. "Amlyth would have married her, and I begged her all I knew, but she was a stubborn, odd lass for all her gentleness and would not let him father the child of his own sire's murderer."

"But you got Amlyth to be David's guardian?"

"That I did!" Megan said triumphantly. "With that, and Dame Isolde's thinking Davie was Amlyth's bastard, it seemed Davie had a good chance to inherit, especially if Amlyth stayed in foreign parts and didn't marry."

Lyn knew Megan would scarcely be telling her all this if she meant to let her go. If a moment came when Megan's attention wavered, Lyn had better rush her and try to wrest away the knife or escape.

"Was it Amlyth's coming back that made you decide to try to get him blamed for the murders and your disappearance?"

Megan nodded. "It was clear he intended to stay and pay more mind to his poor, neglected father. Now pickled in drink as he was, Drude was likely to confess everything."

"Which would have made Amlyth the immediate legal master."

"Right! I said you were a clever lass. Now, when a man inherits a place like Belleforest, what's the first thing he

does? He starts thinking of heirs—sons of his own, not somebody else's bastard!" Megan cackled. "And there were you, with a face and air like my sweet dead girl's, right across the hall from him. Oh, it would have been wedding bells in short order, and cradles to rock, while my own Elaine must bide outside the holy ground and her son be shunted out of what the Drudes owe him. Of course I would kill to prevent that. And disappear forever if need be."

"You shoved Mr. Drude then? And killed Jock?"

"No, no!" Megan laughed. "That was Corbie."

"Corbie kill Jock? I don't believe it."

Wagging a finger, Megan said, "Remember that Jock was seen near Drude before he fell? That was Corbie, dressed in Jock's scarlet. But when Jock caught him out and for grief of his master would have accused Corbie, then Corbie killed his brother."

Sympathy tinged Megan's voice. "Corbie would not have done it to save himself, but he knew if Jock talked, the whole story would come out –how his mistress had concealed her husband's murder and taken his killer for her husband. Of course it was by threatening Corbie to tell all that I was able to make him push Drude. It pays to know secrets. But these won't help you, sweeting."

"And was it you who came up the elevator that night and ran out when I called?"

"To be sure! I wanted to make sure Corbie was holding his counsel. But I wore gloves, my dear, so there'd be no fingerprints. Now you've asked enough, pretty Lynette."

There was a scratching sound, an odor, a wisp of smoke.

"You're going to burn, lassie. No one will ever know where you went to—probably Amlyth will be blamed for it. Just breathe the smoke and you'll die easy. But if you try coming through, I'll cut your pretty throat."

Flames were licking at the bales. In minutes, the loft would be an inferno. Lyn set her feet between the bales and tried to climb up, but Megan darted around.

"Want your fingers chopped, do ye? Come ahead then, come ahead!"

Lyn dropped to the floor and darted for the momentarily unguarded opening. She was nearly through when Megan leaped for her. A small, humped form hurtled between them and flattened Megan in the flaming hay.

"Ay, Corbie!" she gasped, slashing at him. But he had a knife of his own.

Lyn, frozen, stared at the bodies. Flames had caught Megan's tumbled hair and reddened Corbie's black suit.

She bent to tug at them and retched as Megan's head lolled to show a throat cut so deeply that she must be already dead. Corbie twitched forward, Megan's knife between his shoulders, dragged himself up to the window, and sent himself down head first.

"Lyn!"

She thought she was dreaming, and then she turned to see Amlyth on the ladder. "Linnet, get down!" he shouted, and then saw Megan. "My God! Is she— Where's Corbie?"

Gasping, Lyn hurried to the ladder and held to Amlyth as he steadied her and got her outside.

"Stay there," he ordered, with a shuddering glance at Corbie's still body. "I'll see to Megan."

He was back in a moment. He sank down by Lyn while fire dazzled from the windows. "Megan's dead. I think it's best for David that she just be found here, apparently a victim of Corbie's. Poor little man! He did his crimes for love of my mother."

All Lyn could do was lean against him till the worst reaction of terror and revulsion ebbed.

"How did you happen to come when you did?" she managed at last.

"I've thought there was more behind Corbie's behavior than plain grief, and when the police said that Jock had been murdered, I decided it was time to get Corbie alone and find out what he knew. Poor little devil! It spilled out once he started to talk, the whole wild story. And he told where Megan was hiding, and offered to help me catch her."

Amlyth helped Lyn to her feet. "Let's get back and

send some men to be sure the fire doesn't spread. The constable will have to pick up Corbie and what's left of Megan."

Lyn looked backwards at the blazing tower where she had come so near dying, and shuddered as Amlyth hurried her along.

"David? Have you found him?"

"Not yet, but he's surely safe, Linnet. Megan would never harm him. She lived for him, you know—and in a way, died for him."

Megan's bones, teeth, and wedding ring were raked out of the ashes. Although, unlike her daughter, she could have been buried in holy ground, she was, at David's wish, placed beside Elaine under the wych elm. The purple shawl was wrapped about the remnants of this strong, proud, pitiful woman who had dreamed so grandly that she had woven a web of murder and deception that had trapped her at the last.

Corbie, mourned only by Dame Isolde and to a degree by Lyn, was transformed quickly by local gossip into a warped, hideous creature who had killed master, brother, and a harmless village woman.

He *had* committed these murders, of course, but the reasons made all the difference. If he hadn't killed Megan —Lyn had nightmares for weeks about those moments in the tower, the curling smoke, the hungry blade. Corbie had committed the first murders for his mistress's sake, and the last in an effort to remedy what Megan's ambition had led her to.

It didn't seem fair that Corbie should seem a depraved killer while Megan was respected and pitied. But the alternative, which was to reveal the truth about the woman and why she had been killed, seemed a brutal, pointless thing under the circumstances. It would have been an added tragedy in David's young life. Corbie had no relatives or friends to regret him; even so, Lyn didn't feel comfortable with the version Amlyth and Lyn had agreed to stick to.

All Lyn could say for it was that it was better than confronting David with the hideous facts about his grand-

mother. And after all, she had suffered and endured a great deal, enough to bend her mind.

"I wish that awful little dwarf were alive!" David cried in frenzy when he was told about Megan's death. "I'd kill him! Kill him! Oh, I wish he were alive so I could kill him!"

"But he's dead," Amlyth said quietly. "Here, son."

He held out his arms, and after a moment's hesitation, David threw himself into them, and sobbed and grieved and raged till he was exhausted. That was his only violent outbreak, but he kept to himself a lot, and went often to the twin graves by the churchyard, carrying his harp.

Amlyth had told him the secret of his birth, which made the two cousins. Amlyth had also told David about his own wish to marry Elaine, and how he had gone away when she refused. "I would like to have been your father," he told David while the boy watched him with searching, wary eyes. "But at least we're related, and I hope you'll think of me as a father of sorts."

"I'm not used to fathers," David said, not nastily, just stating a fact.

Amlyth chuckled. "Well, shall we try as friends, then, and see what happens?"

"Yes," returned David positively. "And Lyn is my friend, too." He took her hand and they all stood close together, Lyn again experiencing that strange sense that they were a family, although, objectively, they were not.

David's wounds were too deep not to leave scars, but he had his music, and within a few weeks he seemed more relaxed than he had been since Lyn first met him. The mystery of his birth was cleared, and though he would mourn his grandmother for a long time, he was now living in a home with caring people of an age to be parents, he had a man he could admire to match himself against, and he obviously took pride in his ability to lift Dame Isolde's spirits.

Every afternoon, he went to her room and played to her for hours. These were the only times she was actually aware of the real world, and even then her mind played wishful tricks, for she often called him Amlyth.

This shrouding of memory was the kindest thing that could have happened to her. When she had been told of Corbie's death, it had jolted her into remembering her husband's fall and Jock's murder, and it had revivified the guilt connected with her first husband's death.

She had made full confession to Amlyth, staring into her eternal night, her head high but her voice breaking. "It was wrong, I know, Amlyth, but your father was dead, and I—I—my God, I loved his brother. What I thought he was. And so I covered his lie, slept with him in my husband's bed. . . . Can you forgive me, Amlyth?"

A line flashed through Lyn's mind. *Leave her to heaven.*

It may have been in Amlyth's thoughts as he closed his strong hand over her frail one. "Forgiving doesn't enter into it, mother," he said slowly. "I have no power to forgive what you did, only my father could do that."

She shuddered, and he gathered her into his arms as one might hold a loved one who has some horrible, disfiguring disease. And yet his compassion and his will to cherish her were strong enough to vanquish the loathing. "Don't leave me, Amlyth!" she begged. "Please, don't leave me!"

"I love you, mother," he said. "And I will stay here, I won't go away again for any length of time."

Dame Isolde's encounter with the truth was followed by a severe migraine that lasted three days. The suffering hazed her mind again, or perhaps she simply could not exist with her past held before her. She could never remember that Corbie was dead; she kept asking for him in a bewildered way. She accepted Lyn and Amlyth, but only David could rekindle in her the old Drude pride and joy in musical achievement.

"Amlyth," said Kate one night at dinner, a month after Megan's death, "I hope you will understand why I wish to leave. Dame Isolde no longer needs me, I only sit in the dark with her while she drowses or listens to—to that boy. If she ever recovers enough to carry on with her memoirs, I'd be glad to help get them ready for publication, of course."

Amlyth gave his one-time love a long, straight look. "It's your decision, Kate. You certainly needn't feel you're letting mother down. But –well, what will you do?"

The smile she flashed him was almost merry. "You won't have to pension me off! I am going to marry Timothy, Gillian's cousin."

After a moment of shock, Amlyth rose and went ceremoniously around the table. "I'll kiss the bride early," he said. "May you both be very happy!"

Kate departed the next week, more triumphant and joyous than sad, though she wept when she told an uncomprehending Dame Isolde goodbye and gave Lyn a quick hug.

"Stay in touch, dear," Kate adjured. She gave Amlyth, waiting out of earshot in the hall below, an amused, half-exasperated, half-affectionate look. "I rather think you'll be staying long after your work permit runs out!"

Lyn brooded on her joking remark for some time after Kate had vanished down the drive in Timothy's Jaguar. Amlyth had withdrawn to his room, and David was playing to Dame Isolde, the sweet trills and glissandos floating down from upstairs.

The upheaval at Belleforest had been so massive that there hadn't been time for Lyn to think much about her own future. Kate's leaving seemed to mark the end of the period of drastic, rapid change, however. It was time to consider the totally altered situation.

Amlyth's behavior puzzled Lyn. His tone always lightened with her, he was kind and pleasant, but he spent most of his time working in his room or going about Belleforest with David and with Thomas Tidwell, discussing what improvements and repairs to make.

He had plenty to digest, of course, though he did not talk about. What did he feel about his mother's knowledge of his father's death, and her concealment of that for all these years? What were his feelings toward the uncle who had usurped his father's place? Whatever Amlyth's emotions were, he had no way to vent them. The uncle was dead; Dame Isolde was too shattered and helpless, too

cut off from the strong lusting woman who had conspired to keep her lover's terrible secret, to be even verbally chastised.

Still, there must be in Amlyth unmeasured depths of horror, revulsion, and anger. Surely, too, all this had brought back disturbing memories of gentle, proud Elaine —and Lyn was swept with a chill certainty that no living woman, far less an itinerant American, could replace that lost dream, especially now that Amlyth could foster Elaine's son.

Besides, Lyn thought forlornly, almost running from the house and into the comforting shadows of the Silver Wood, who could tell how much of Amlyth's gallantry with her was a means of piquing Kate, or how much was a man's way of finding amusement. He was safe so long as Kate was around; but now that the household had compressed itself, now that Dame Isolde no longer dominated, it was going to be difficult for Amlyth to maintain a distance.

Lyn burned with humiliation, even though she told herself to go easy and not jump to conclusions. Did her presence put Amlyth in an embarrassing spot? The enforced intimacy would become speedily impossible unless he cared about her.

The sad, lovely ballad thrummed in Lyn's mind: "It bids you come to Silver Wood and ask the leave of none. . . ."

But she must not stay in Silver Wood, or Silver Room either, unless Amlyth wanted her there. He could find another harp teacher for David. And since it would be difficult for him to ask Lyn to give up her post, she must offer to do so.

Right now, cleanly, quietly, quickly. Before it got worse, before she was woven more tightly into the tapestry of a life she would not be asked to share. It was the best decision, the only one.

Why, then, was there a wailing inside her like fraying harp strings? Lyn caught in her breath, lifted her head and turned around.

Amlyth stood there.

She gasped and stepped back, but he took her hands. "Linnet. I've been thinking about us."

"So have I," she said, cursing the rapid pounding of her heart. "Shall I go away, Amlyth? Would that be better for you?"

He stared at her in consternation. "Good Lord!" he said at last, tightening his grasp on her fingers. "What wild imaginings do you get up to on your own? You go away? What would we do without you?"

"Manage very well, I'm sure," she managed to say in spite of the catch in her throat.

"We'd scrape by," he said comically. "I have to say that in case you really want to go. Do you?"

"Not if—if you want me here."

"I want you here," he said, indicating the woods and house. "But mostly I want you *here*." And he drew her into his arms.

David's playing drifted down, and Lyn wondered how long it would take them to work up some wedding music. There would be grief and problems around Belleforest for a good while to come, but with music and love, these could be got through.

She started to tell Amlyth this, but he had other plans which, Lyn decided, were much better than talking.

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